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QUITE ALONE.

BY

GEORGE AUGUSTUS SALA.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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QUITE ALONE.

CHAPTER I.

THE WILD WOMAN.

WHAT was Lily to do? Try another pawn-shop? She had no passport. They must have papers. It was the law, it seemed. But how did people get papers? Were they born with papers? Should she go back to the goldsmiths on the Quai and try them once more? Alas! of what avail would that be? She would receive only the same answers, the same rebuffs. Was there no one in this enormous city of Paris who would purchase a gewgaw from a poor child who wanted to run away? She had heard of a place called the Temple. She had read of it, too, and Madame de Kergolay had talked

to her about it hundreds of times as the site of that old donjon keep where the Martyr King and his queen had lain in captivity, and where the poor little Dauphin had been handed over to the cobbler Simon, to be slowly tortured to death. The donjon keep was pulled down now, and the Temple was a place where they bought and sold everything. Should she ask her way there? But she knew that she would have to pass close to the Marais; and an indefinable terror forbade her to retrace her footsteps.

She came, suddenly, in the middle of the pavement, on a marchand d'habits—an old-clothesman. No Jew was he. In Paris, Christians do not disdain to carry the bag, and wear the three hats. This fellow was a Marseillais, swarthy and bright-eyed, with a head of tufted black hair, dazzling white teeth, and earrings. He had two umbrellas beneath one arm, and a cavalry sabre beneath the other, a cocked-hat in one hand besides the three on his head, a pair of patent leather boots tucked in his waistband, and any number of loose garments flying all abroad about him: besides his bulging bag.

“*Troun de l'air!*” cried the marchand d'habits when he saw Lily, “what a pretty girl.”

“Will you buy a locket?” said the girl, shrinking from the man's bold gaze, and holding out the trinket in her little trembling hand. She was des-

perate, now. She would have had courage to ask the statue of Henry the Fourth on the Pont Neuf if he would buy a locket.

"Carragoui de zeval," exclaimed the Marseillais in return, "I am not a jeweller. What do you want for your little breloque, mon anze zérie?"

"A hundred francs," replied Lily, half choking.

"Masoulipatam!" shouted the marchand d'habits, who seemed to possess an inexhaustible arsenal of strange execrations. "Veux-tou mi rouiner? Ma, I will be generous. Ze souis Chrétien, moi, et pas oune Zouif. Twelve francs fifty centimes for your locket."

"No," cried Lily, passionately. She could have strangled the man.

"Quesaco! crrricuicoui!" continued the Marseillais. "Don't fly into a temper. I don't buy jewellery on fête-days. Come and breakfast with me. Allons manzer, allons boire!" And the eyes of the old-clothesman sparkled like unto live coals.

Lily drew her shawl about her, and, spurning his offer, walked indignantly away.

"Pif de Pilate!" the Marseillais muttered, looking after her, "z'est oune zentille petite fillette za. Never mind. I shall dance at the Barrière du Trône to-night. Marchand d'hab-i-i-i-ts." And with his lugubrious and long-drawn-out chant, his bag and his bright eyes, the old-clothesman went on his way. They were magnificent eyes, only he

had spoilt them by a habit of squinting, contracted through the endeavour to glance at the first floor windows on both sides of the street at once, to see whether the occupants had any old clothes to sell.

Twelve francs fifty for her locket! The villains. The wicked, wicked, hard-hearted people, she thought. Had she had time, she could have sat down on a door-step, covered her face with her shawl, and cried her eyes out. But it was with her as with the Wandering Jew, "Onward! Onward!"

She remembered that she was not yet quite destitute. Her breakfast paid for, she was still the possessor of between eighteen and nineteen francs. That would carry her some distance towards her destination—support her for some days, she thought. And then she would beg. *She* beg! Perhaps there were cottages on the road where the people were kind and would give her bread and milk, and allow her to sleep on the straw in their barns. She would have nothing more to do with this cruel and pitiless Paris. She would begin her journey at once. How it was to be prosecuted she had not the slightest idea. She knew she had to reach the coast and to cross the sea: that was all.

The Marseillais marchand d'habits had told her, the *rascal!* that he never bought jewellery on fête-days. Once or twice before in the course of that weary morning's travel, she had heard about the festivals. At the pawnbroker's they had bidden

her to be quick, for they were about to close. The poor, it seems, must pawn, even on the morning of a holiday, so the commissaire-priseur opened his doors for an hour or two before the business of pleasure began.

Lily saw that there were a great many more people about, this morning, than on ordinary days; that many of the shops, and nearly all those of a superior class, were closed; that the humbler sort of people mostly wore clean blouses, and the grisettes clean caps; that the students of the School of St. Cyr were abroad in their holiday clothes; that the soldiers of the garrison looked unusually spruce and burnished up; and that the very sergents de ville had waxed their moustaches, and given their sword-hilts an extra polish. There were a good many flowers about; from many of the windows hung banners and streamers; and in front of every public building rose great black triangular stages, like monstrous but truncated ladders, supporting on their many rungs pipkins full of oil and tallow, in which were huge cotton wicks. These were the lampions for the illuminations at night.

Then Lily all at once remembered that this was the twenty-seventh of July, and that Madame de Kergolay had told her that on the twenty-seventh, the twenty-eighth, and the twenty-ninth of that month, in every year, the official gala-days known

as the Fêtes of July were held. "They are to celebrate the democratic revolution of July, 1830," the old lady would say, disdainfully; "the revolution so adroitly discounted in their own favour, by M. le Duc d'Orléans and the banker Lafitte. It is an official celebration, strictly a government affair, my child, and the maskings and mummeries and tight-rope dancing are all paid for out of the public treasury. The people have nothing to do with it—absolutely nothing. The only holiday which lives in their memories and in their hearts is the Fête de St. Louis."

Thus Madame de Kergolay; and Lily had, of course, implicitly believed her. But she could not help thinking now, as she watched the gaily dressed and laughing throngs hurrying past, that, if the Fête of St. Louis were in their hearts, the lights of the Fêtes of July shone uncommonly bright in their faces. Every one looked happy: everybody *must* be happy, thought the poor little outcast runaway, her sad heart sinking within her, at the sight of the smiles and the joyous faces. She little knew that among that laughing concourse there were numbers upon numbers ten thousand times more miserable than she.

It was good that she should not know it. It would not have consoled her. She had not yet arrived at that age when "there is something not absolutely disagreeable to us in the misfortunes of

our dearest friends." The wretcheder she was herself—being, as you know, young and silly, and not at all a woman of the world—the readier she was to sympathise with sorrow. She was but a little fool, at the best; but she never grew out of *that* folly.

So it was a grand holiday, a very grand holiday. The government liked to encourage holidays; it made the people feel light and pleasant, and saved them from getting the headache over those stupid newspapers. On the third, and grandest day of the fêtes, the newspapers were not published at all:—another thing which the government liked dearly. A good government, a paternal government, a light-hearted government; it rejoiced to see the hard-worked editors and reporters strolling in the Elysian Fields, dining at the Café Anglais, or dancing at the Chaumière—even if they danced that naughty cancan—instead of muddling their brains in the composition of prosy leading articles, or wearing their fingers to the bone in taking crabbed shorthand notes of the long-winded debates of the Chambers. "Enjoy yourselves, my children," cried this good government. "In these last days of July let us sing a *Te Deum* for fine weather, an abundant crop of strawberries, and the possession of so beneficent a sovereign as that dear old gentleman with the umbrella at the Tuileries yonder. See; he wears a tricolored cockade, the emblem of Liberty,

in his hat. Is that not good of him? Let us celebrate the feast of the Patriots of July. What glorious fellows they were. Shout! How nobly they fought. Fire the cannon! How heroically they died. Drub the double drums! How very soundly they sleep, in the vaults under the column in the Place de la Bastille. Let us drink all their healths, and inscribe all their names, even to the humblest blouse-wearer, in golden letters on the marble plinth. As for the patriots of to-day, they are a pack of sulky disagreeable grumblers, mere spoil-sports and trouble-fêtes, and, lest they should mar the bright sunshine of our holiday, we have put them away in the casemates of Belle Isle, and Mont St. Michel, and Doullens, and turned a big key on them. Soldiers! bring your muskets to the 'ready,' and, bombardiers, keep your matches lighted. This is a fête-day. Everybody is to enjoy himself under pain of immediate arrest. Eat, drink, and be merry, my children. Go to the play for nothing. See the illuminations, and the fireworks, and the water-jousts, for nothing; meanwhile, we, who are your parents and best friends, will govern you, and look after all your little affairs, at home and abroad. Tiens! that birchen rod of ours is getting a little limp. Excuse us if we use one of iron."

So spoke the Government of July, thinking it was to last for ever; but it, and its dynasty, and

its festivals, and all its pretty little winning ways, are dead and gone, and well-nigh effaced from the memory of man.

For aught Lily knew, the gay doings might be in honour of the birthday of King Louis Philippe, or the birthday of Monsieur Lafitte the banker. To her mind, the revolution of 1830 conveyed but a very dim and meagre impression. Once, when Mademoiselle Espréménil, who was an Orleanist, told her that three hundred patriots were killed on the Place du Carrousel, fighting against the Swiss guard, she exclaimed, "How very wicked of them to fight against the king's soldiers!" and was called nigaude, and made to copy out the third chapter of *Télémaque*, for her pains. She had never gone outside the doors of the Pension Marcassin at the time of the celebration of the fêtes, during the whole of her incarceration in that penitentiary. The other girls had given her, from time to time, glowing accounts of what they had seen during the three glorious days; but to Lily those were only fairy tales and fables, as beautiful but as unreal as any in the *Arabian Nights*.

Now, she was privileged—by her own act and deed at least—to see the grand sight, for a momentary peep at which, even, she had often thirsted, and to wander at will among the merry-makers. But she fled from it all as though it had been a pestilence. She was afraid. While the

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day lasted, she thought, it would be folly, it would be madness, to venture into the Elysian Fields, where all the world of Paris would be out walking. No, no : that place was to be avoided at all hazards. Still she had an irresistible craving to see something of the brave show, before she commenced her flight to England in good earnest. She would wait until sunset, she thought—until nearly dusk. Then the crowd would be denser, and the quieter sort of folks gone home, and she might mingle with the throng unnoticed and unrecognised.

Now lagging, now hurrying through a tortuous maze of streets, she came all at once into the great garish Rue de Rivoli, and saw the Tuileries Gardens and the Place de la Concorde one vast Lake of Pleasure, covered with Islands of Delight, blazing in the sun. She turned from the dangerous open, and fled. Ascending the Rue St. Honoré she ventured to cross it before she reached the Palais Royal, and even got safe over the upper part of the Rue de Rivoli into the dismal little labyrinth of by-lanes, full of sellers of old prints, and older curiosities, technically known as the *Pâté du Louvre*, and which had grown up, a fungus, between the palaces of the Louvre and the Tuileries. To her relief she managed to gain the Quai : not that where the old gold-dealers live, but that which fronts the Long Gallery. She crossed the Pont Royal as timorously as a little mouse

seeking a fresh hole, and, diving down the Rue du Bac, was glad to lose herself in a fresh labyrinth of little streets.

She found out, perhaps, the dimmest little cabinet de lecture, or reading-room, that ever was groped for, and at last discovered, in the dimmest portion of old Paris. It seemed, to Lily, not much bigger in size than the cage of a good-sized macaw, and was very dark and gloomy, and so suited her admirably. The old maiden lady who kept this abode of literature had read herself more than three parts blind with bad novels, and was so deeply immersed in one of the admired works of Monsieur Horace St. Aubin, that, when Lily entered, she could barely find time to extend her hand for five sous—the regulation price of admission to the Cabinet of the Muses.

All the people who frequented the reading-room were old—as old as the visitors whom Madame de Kergolay received, but of a shabbier and more dilapidated type. They seemed to be tumbling to pieces with sheer antiquity, both in their bodies and their garments, and to be only kept together by means of stays, and braces, and pins, and buttons, and hooks, the horns of spectacles, the springs of false teeth, and the elastic bands of wigs. There never was such a rickety congregation. Ague, paralysis, neuralgia, and sciatica, seemed to have gotten hold of the furniture as

well as the patrons of the establishment; and everything tottered and shook, and trembled and creaked. As Lily walked up the room, and chose the darkest corner, the very boards yielded beneath her tread, and sent up little clouds of dust, giving to her ankles a wreathed appearance, as though she had been a young Mercury.

There was a tall old gentleman who came to the Cabinet, not to read, but to sleep. It could not be said precisely that he snored, but the air about him seemed to be haunted by the spirit of a defunct trombone. And it was a spirit seemingly in pain.

There was a little old lady who represented a prodigious cap, a large pair of green goggles, a red plaid shawl, and nothing else. Her face seemed to have gone out of town, and to have left a P.P.C. card over the spectacles, on which some one had sketched the lineaments of a death's head; but sketched them very faintly. And most of the time even this was a fact which you were not enabled to ascertain with any degree of certainty, as the little old lady usually kept a copy of the *Gazette de France* before her, never turning over the pages; and under those circumstances she was only so much newspaper, and so much shawl.

Over against Lily there sat an ancient personage of the male sex, lean and long as Don Quixote, and wearing a nightcap under his hat.

He had a long green cloak with a rabbit's skin collar; and under this cloak he fondled and cherished a diminutive dog of, apparently, the turnspit breed. There was a very strict prohibition against the introduction of dogs to the Cabinet, in a notice hung up at the entrance. But the old gentleman had very probably been offending against the regulations for the last fifty years. He was the senior, the doyen of the customers. Those who surrounded him were too old and feeble to resent his malfeasance, and the lady at the counter was too much engrossed by Monsieur Horace St. Aubin to take notice of anything outside her book. Still, the old man in the cloak was not exempt from occasional twinges of conscience. The little dog was generally very quiet, but, from time to time, feeling bored probably, he would poke his nose from beneath the folds of the mantle, with a sharp yap, or a plaintive whine. And then Lily would hear the lean old man whispering in great trepidation to the refractory turnspit: "Hush, for Heaven's sake, Lindor! De la sagesse, mon ami—de la sagesse, Lindor; remember what a risk I am running for thee. Je t'implore, Lindor, de ne pas me compromettre. I entreat thee, Lindor, not to compromise me." Once, the lean old man caught Lily looking at him. The turnspit had been very restless. The old man covered its tiny muzzle with both his white trembling hands, and

cast towards Lily a look at once so piteous and so supplicating that the girl felt half inclined to laugh, and half to cry.

She stayed here, reading newspapers out of date, and dog's-eared romances, which excited, for two reasons, her special wonder : first, as to whoever could have written them ; and next, whoever could have read them before her. That they had been diligently conned, however, and to some purpose, was evident ; for the edges were yellow and shiny with much thumbing, and many pages were blistered with long dried-up tears.

They were all full of love ; but it was not the kind of love that Lily could comprehend, with which she could sympathise, or from which she could derive any consolation. Silly girl, she was quite raw and ignorant. She had not yet learnt to take her heart to pieces and put it together again, like a map puzzle. She had not acquired the art of preserving her passion, and boiling it down, and putting plenty of sugar to it, and spreading it on paper, as jam is spread upon bread. Lamentable little dunce ! She was yet at the A B C of the great alphabet, which, being learnt, after infinite wailings and canings, only teaches us to spell the words Disappointment and Despair. She was quite a novice in the cosmography of the Pays du Tendre. Had Lily been asked to write a love-letter, it would have begun with "I love,"

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and it would have ended with "I love," and there would have been nothing else, except blots, which are the blushes of manuscript. I have known people who punctuated their protestations of affection. They must have been very much in love indeed.

Here she lingered until the day was declining. She went out at last (the mistress of the place never heeding her), and she left the old folks there, doddering and coughing feebly in their chairs. Those who are alive, and the oldest folks always seem to last the longest, may be there, doddering and choking to this day.

Into the broad streets, and on to the broader quay, and over another bridge; but this time it was the Pont de la Concorde, and they were beginning to light up the lampions in front of the Chamber of Deputies. Then, she was in the vast Place, by the side of the Luxor obelisk. She could resist it no longer. She was beyond the control of reason. She was bewildered—fascinated. Come what may, she must see the sight.

So she sped by the spouting fountains, and entered upon the enormous avenue of the Elysian Fields. The sight almost took away her breath. It was wonderful. Two huge open air theatres, within whose vast prosceniums whole regiments of red-legged soldiers were engaged in deadly combat with white-burnoused Arabs. They fired off real

guns, and real howitzers. Real horses galloped on to the stage, not at all alarmed by the noise, whereas the very smell of the powder almost frightened Lily out of her wits.

But the theatres were only a drop of water in the sea. There were Punches by the score. There were Marionettes. There were greasy poles up which adventurous gymnasts climbed, intent on reaching the silver watches, spoons, and mugs—no vulgar legs of mutton here!—suspended to a hoop at the summit. What shouting and clapping of hands when a climber, his strained fingers within an inch of the coveted prize, found the treacherous surface beneath at length too much for him, and so slid down to the bottom again, defeated and fat-begrimed.

There were merry-go-rounds. There were targets at which you could fire *au blanc*, and if you struck the bull's-eye, found a plaster figure of the Emperor Napoleon arise, like a jack-in-a-box. Nine-pins; spring top; roulette playing for macaroons; jugglers; acrobats; rope-dancers, dancing-dogs and monkeys; a camel; a bear that beat a tambourine; a goat that danced at the bidding of a gipsy woman dressed up as Esmeralda; a dog that, being desired to name the greatest rogue in company, walked straight up to his master, wagged his tail, and barked an unmistakable "This is he;" several other dogs, with cocked-hats tied under their chins, military coats, and frilled pantaloons, who per-

formed gavottes, looking most mournful the while ; a camel, on whose head a little boy executed a saraband ; everything, in short, that was wonderful, and strange, and delightful.

Booths where gingerbread was sold, brown, sticky-looking, shiny gingerbread, like Moorish faces on a very hot day, and with great white oval almonds in them, like eyes ; booths where sweetmeats were dispensed ; where fruit and fried potatoes, hot pie-crust—the famous galette—and gauffre cakes were to be had—all these abounded. And shrilly sounded above the myriad noises of the throng, and was audible even in the intervals of blank cartridge firing, the voice of the man who sold cocoa. “A la fraîche ! à la fraîche !” he cried. A little round tower, with crenelated top bristling with many-coloured flags, and hung with gay tinkling bells, was strapped to his back. Beneath his arm passed the brass pipe and tap from which he frothed his cool but mawkish beverage. Around his body was slung a wooden cestus, and thick hanging from it a store of goblets of burnished tin, that shone as bright as silver. Still cried he, “A la fraîche ! à la fraîche !” his bells tinkling, and his flags waving through the jostling mass.

There were no dandies here, no leaders of fashion, no eye-glass wearers, no fan-twirlers. You might look around in vain for gold watch-chains, for varnished boots, for bright bonnets, or

for robes of silk. This was the People's festival; and they, the People, pure and simple, were here in force. This was one of the three days in the year when Jacques Bonhomme was in his glory, and had the best of it. He might come in a clean blouse, or in a dirty blouse, or in his shirt-sleeves; but he was welcome to the show for nothing. So many hundred thousands of francs were set aside every year to amuse him, and to buy him toys, and to make him forget his rights. He forgot them, for the nonce; but the paternal government who turned showman on Jacques's behalf, found it impossible to make of the whole year one long July, and to have a festival every day. The result of which solution of continuity was, that when it wasn't July, and there were no fireworks, dancing-dogs, and open-air theatres, and work was scarce, and bread dear, Jacques Bonhomme would turn on the paternal government, suddenly remember his rights, and rend his rulers in pieces.

Lily thought it very kind indeed of the good gentlemen, whoever they were, who had provided this sumptuous spectacle, and charged nothing for it. She had a vague idea, from some staring placards she had read on the walls, that the Prefect of the Department of the Seine had something to do with this grand merry-making. He must be a very good man, she thought. Perhaps it was *his* birthday.

She had eaten and drunk nothing since breakfast; so, calling to mind that she was hungry, she dined frugally on two sous' worth of gingerbread and an apple. She had even the hardihood to stop one of the men who wore the round towers strapped on their backs, and, accosting him as "Monsieur," asked him for a glass of cocoa.

The particular merchant she chanced to patronise displayed considerable splendour in the fittings of his establishment. His round tower was covered with crimson cotton velvet, hooped with gilt foil paper, and embowered in his flags was a little brazen eagle with outstretched wings.

He frothed up the cocoa so for Lily, that the beading bubbles on the rim sparkled in the evening sun like diamonds, and presented her the goblet with an air.

"Drink," he said, "belle dame. It is the nectar of the gods."

It wasn't anything of the sort. It was merely so much Spanish liquorice boiled down with a little sarsaparilla, but the merchant had such a winning way with him that, had he asseverated that the Nabob of Arcot's diamond was dissolved in his cocoa, he might have found those to believe him.

"How much, monsieur?" asked Lily, when she had drunk.

"To you," the merchant replied, with a bow and

a flourish, "one sou. A pint of cocoa and a quart of froth, all for five centimes."

Lily paid him. Straightway he whisked out a napkin which hung from his cestus, gave the goblet an extra polish, frothed it again, and handed it to Lily.

"Drink again, belle dame," he said. "For this I charge nothing. It is my humble offering to youth and beauty. And I declare that had not my family, through political misfortunes, supped deeply of misery, and were not my old grandmother, lâ-bas, down yonder in la Sologne in misery, sur la paille, I would have made you pay nothing for the first."

Although the girl's thirst was assuaged, she did not like to offend the hospitable merchant, and so half emptied the goblet he offered her. Then she thanked him and curtseyed, and turned, and was soon lost in the crowd.

"I salute you," cried he of the round tower, looking after her retreating figure. "Belle dame, I am at your feet. Pauvre petite," he continued, polishing up his cups, "she is too young and too pretty to be wandering in this tohubohu, quite alone. But, bah! she is safer here than on the Boulevard of the Italiens. The blouses will do her no harm. A la fraîche! faites-vous servir! à la fraîche!" and he went on his way, jangling his cups and tinkling his bells.

It was nearly eight o'clock, but bright and mellow daylight yet. Lily had been struggling against temptation for a long time, but she could now resist it no longer. She had never seen one before in her life. She must go inside and see one—a show.

No, not the educated seal, the pictured resemblance of the monster on the cartoon outside the booth, where he resided, terrified her. Not the Oriental menagerie either: the roaring she could hear through the canvas, the squeals and yelps as the keeper plied his switch, and the acrid odour, peculiar to wild beast shows, appalled her more than the terrific paintings, much larger than life, of the panther of Java, the gigantic baboon of Sumatra, the hyæna of Abyssinia, the crocodile of the Nile, and the boa-constrictor of Seringapatam, by means of which the enterprising proprietor of the Oriental menagerie strove to attract patronage. The grand concourse of the combat of animals, where a wretched old white horse was to be baited by sundry mastiffs, she likewise avoided.

But the waxwork show! the royal and imperial exhibition of waxwork of Signor Ventimillioni (from Milan), she *must* see that. It cost ten sous to see this show, but Lily paid them.

Signor Ventimillioni himself took her half-franc. He was a tall, sallów man, with a coal-black beard, and wore a velvet waistcoat of Scotch plaid, but

was otherwise attired as a Roman emperor. He stared very long and very impudently at Lily. What was there about the child, that every one stared at her so?

She drew aside a curtain that veiled the entrance, and entered. She started back with a shriek at the first object she saw. It was a colossal gendarme in a monstrous cocked-hat and jack-boots. His face, fringed with huge peaked moustaches and chin-tuft, was pale as death. His eyes glared horribly with a fixed and stony gaze. In one gauntleted hand he brandished a gleaming sabre. He looked like one of those ominous officers of the Convention Lily had seen in pictures, who came to conduct Marie Antoinette to the scaffold. He had come at last to take her, she thought, shrinking in her inmost soul. She was to be arrested for running away, and trying to sell her locket!

"You little imbecile," cried a fat cattle-dealer from Poissy, who had followed close on her heels, and giving her, as he spoke, a slight push with his umbrella, "you foolish child, don't you see that ce cuistre à ceinture jaune is only waxwork?"

The cattle-dealer had paid his ten sous before, and often, and knew the ways of men and wax-work shows. He was chuckling at his penetration, when the voice of Signor Ventimillioni was heard in a shrill treble, frantically shrieking:

"Les armes et les parapluies sont déposés à la

porte—weapons and umbrellas must be left at the door. Advance, messieurs et mesdames. Advance, I supplicate you.”

The cattle-dealer turned back, grumbling, to give up his gingham; but Lily advanced. The show soon made her feel very faint. It smelt oppressively of lukewarm wax, and sawdust, and old clothes. Apart from the good King Henry the Fourth, Monsieur de Voltaire, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Sir Hudson Lowe (who was aptly represented in a yellow cloak lined with leopard's skin, the well-known uniform of general officers in the British army), the collection was mainly composed of eminent murderers. Louvet was there, holding, of course, the identical poniard with which he slew the Duke of Berry. Next him Avril, and Lacenaire, who with a bottle of Chambertin before him was represented as absorbed in the composition of a sonnet. Fieschi with his arm shattered, and his face all dabbled with blood; the personages in the *Affair Fualdès*, playing boston at a gory card-table; Pontis de Sainte-Hélène in the fetters and red nightcap of a Toulon galley-slave; the Bergère d'Ivry—for there were victims here as well as assassins—with her throat cut, and the Courier of Lyons with a bullet through his head. Horror!

“Call that *Madame Lafarge*?” the cattle-dealer from Poissy was heard to murmur as he halted before the effigy of a fashionably-dressed lady

wearing a white chip bonnet and a black lace veil. "It is an infamy, an imposture! Je te reconnais, coquine. Thou hast not been to the fair of Poissy for nothing. Two years since thou wert Charlotte Corday; last July thou wert the Duchess of Berry previous to her betrayal by the Jew Deubz, and now, affublée d'un nouveau cotillon, and that gimcrack bonnet on thy head, thou must pass, forsooth, for the Veuve Lafarge, née Marie Capelle. C'est une supercherie inouïe. I demand my money back. I have a great mind to beat thy waxen head off, fraudulent puppet." It was evident that the confiscation of his umbrella still rankled in the cattle-dealer's mind.

Forth again into the Babel of money-making went Lily. She had had enough of shows for the time. Where was she to pass the night? How shamefully she had loitered her time away! How recklessly she had been squandering her slender stock of money! But she could not muster up courage enough to flee the enchanted ground. It had a strange and deadly fascination for her, and, like a moth round a candle, she felt she must continue to hover about it: even to her destruction.


She absolutely, before it was quite dark, went to see another show. It is true that this was a humble spectacle, and only cost five sous. The attraction was a solitary one: there was but a wild woman to be seen.

“*La femme sauvage—la femme sauvage!*—the wild woman!” cried, with stentorian lungs, the orator, in a full suit of armour and a hussar’s busby, from the platform in front of the booth. “The wild woman from Madagascar, the largest of the group known as the *Inexorable Islands*. Her name is *Antannariva Zoraïde*. The idolatrous practices of her ancestors she has abjured, and is a good Christian, wearing three medals blessed by *le Saint Père the Pope*, who sent to Rome for her expressly to bestow his patronage and benediction upon her; but she lives entirely on raw meat, and neither threats nor persuasion can induce her to wear stays. The wild woman! Ladies and gentlemen! This is her last appearance in France. Reconciled to her illustrious family, she leaves tomorrow morning for Madagascar by the *Messageries Royales* of Messrs. *Lafitte and Caillard*, stopping only at Lisbon in order to be presented to the infants and infantas of the *House of Braganza*. The wild woman, *messieurs les amateurs!* Her disposition is amiable, and her tastes are artistic. She can lift a weight of one hundred and fifty kilogrammes with the little finger of her right hand, and suffer a pastille to burn to charcoal on the tip of her tongue. *En avant* for the wild woman. Admission only five sous, a reduction of eight hundred per cent. in consequence of *la cherté des denrées*—the high price of provisions. Nobody

can enter without paying, but paying without entering is permitted by the civil and military authorities."

The crowd, who had been listening to this balderdash with a grin of bewildered complacency, burst into a roar of laughter at the concluding witticism. There was a press of sight-seers at once to the ladder. That prodigal little Lily, after gazing for a while at the violently chromatic portraits of the Wild Woman strangling a Tigress; the Wild Woman riding three wild horses at once; the Wild Woman in the wilds of her native Madagascar, taking refuge in the branches of a banyan-tree from the pursuit of the hunters; the Wild Woman kissing the Pope's toe; the Wild Woman lifting ponderous weights, firing off pistols, and defeating the celebrated Monsieur Grisier in a fencing match—after contemplating these astounding works of art, the desolate little girl wandered into the show, which was now lit by a hoop of flaring oil lamps suspended from the centre pole of the tent, and took her seat with some twenty others on the last of a row of planks placed on trestles.

There was a little proscenium and a rude set-scene supposed to represent Madagascar. On the prompt side there was a screen, and on the O. P. sat a hump-backed man with a flageolet and a kettle-drum, the which he thumped and blew alternately.



But he tootled on this pipe, and whanged the parchment so long, that the audience grew impatient. It was surely more than time for the show to begin. Murmurs of "*La femme sauvage! La femme sauvage!*" began to be heard. "*Eh marchez donc : faites voir vos trucs,*" was the next expression of the popular wish. The orator in full armour pushed his way through the auditory, climbed on to the stage, and disappeared behind the screen. Voices were now heard in angry contention; but still the Wild Woman failed to make her appearance.

There was the voice of a man, seemingly endeavouring to pacify an infuriated woman. The man's voice Lily recognised at once as that of the orator in chivalric panoply whom she had heard haranguing outside. The voice of the woman :—Merciful Heavens! where had she heard those angry tones before? and why did they sound like a death-knell on her ear, and send a cold shiver through her heart?

At this conjuncture a gentleman in a blouse, affected perchance by the heat of the weather, or by inordinate libations of cocoa, and stung to desperation by the prolonged absence of the Wild Woman and the monotonous iteration of the flageolet and kettle-drum, cried out, "*Attrape, Mayeux!*" and flung a roasted apple at the orchestrant. Hit by the soddened pulp precisely on

the nose, the hunchback uttered an unearthly yell, and rushed from the stage, shrieking, "A la garde ! à la garde !"

The sound of something breaking—glass seemingly—was next heard, and a black bottle became visible, and rolled to the footlights. The gentleman who had flung the pomme cuite, and who occupied a front row, picked the bottle off the stage, smelt it, and exclaimed :

"Cognac. The Wild Woman must be en ribotte."

But the words had scarcely left his lips before the screen was violently dashed down, and a woman, thinly clad in a tawdry and absurd costume, made her appearance in the enforced company of the orator in armour. I say enforced ; for, by one hand she held him by the hair of the head, while with the other she brandished aloft a three-legged stool, with which she was minded, apparently, to brain him.

The audience taking this to be a part of the performance, and, in fact, the prearranged entrée en scène of the Wild Woman, began to applaud vehemently ; but the dolorous expostulations of the armour-clad orator soon undeceived them.

"Help, help !" he cried, in piteous accents ; "ladies and gentlemen, I shall be murdered ! This woman has taken too much cognac. She is mad. She will kill me !"

Suddenly the Wild Woman relaxed her grasp, flung the showman disdainfully on one side, and stood planted in the middle of the stage, her hands on her sides. Lily looked at her. She was a powerful woman, lithe and shapely, but of what age it was impossible to discover, through the paint and the sham tattoo-marks with which her face and arms were ruddled. For all apparel she wore a suit of fleshings, a blue gauze scarf, sandals, a spangled skirt which failed to reach to her knees, and a preposterous head-dress of Dutch metal and feathers.


But anon Lily became conscious that the Wild Woman was looking at her with a fierce, fixed, hungry gaze. There was something in her eyes that struck infinite horror and terror into her. And just as the Wild Woman made a step in advance, as though towards her, Lily started from her seat in affright, and rushed from the booth.

CHAPTER II.

LILY IS SEIZED.

LILY was in haste now to leave those Elysian Fields, which had exercised so strange a fascination over her. She was haunted by the eyes of that painted woman. She wandered about for full an hour she knew not whither ; dazed by the coloured lamps, the crowds, the shouts, the braying of bands ; the hoarse rhetoric of the mountebanks, the roaring of the cannon, which were to usher in the fireworks. She sought vainly for an outlet from the saturnalia ; but the crowd compassed her about, and hemmed her in, and on its remotest borders there seemed to be more shows and more crowds.

She was almost in despair when, thinking to gain the Place de la Concorde, and in view, even,



of the great obelisk, which from base to apex was one blaze of light, she found herself wedged in a mass of sight-seers who were gathered round the carriage of a quack doctor. Lily had never seen the *Elisir d'Amore*, but there, as large as life, was Doctor *Dulcamara*. He had deviated a little from the costume on which the late admirable Lablache conferred well-merited fame, inasmuch as over his well-powdered periwig he wore a Roman helmet of brass, with a tremendous plume of crimson horse-hair; but the scarlet coat, the frills, the ruffles, the top-boots, the buckskin, the watch and pendulous seals, the snuff-box, the signet-ring, and the gold-headed cane, all belonged to the opera. He was an impudent vagabond, at best; but had the flow of flashy verbiage common to his tribe, and scores of hands were speedily extended from the crowd beneath him, holding francs and half francs to be exchanged for the worthless nostrums he extolled so highly.

His calèche, and the white horse that drew it, to boot, were quite a bower of Chinese lanterns; and in the rumble sat his servant, who was attired as a drum-major in the Imperial Guard, whose business it was to be the butt of his master's jokes, and grind the barrel-organ when *Dulcamara* was out of breath. The under quack was a fellow of cadaverous traits and discontented mien, and appeared heartily ashamed of his position. He had reason

to be. He was the real doctor. His diploma and license to practise were duly certified by the Faculty of Paris, and without them Dulcamara would have been hauled to prison as a swindler : but the genuine physician being poor and idle, and dissolute and drunken, the quack was content to pay him so much a year to use his diploma ; and he filled up his leisure time by grinding the barrel-organ. "On demande un médecin pour voyager." Have you never seen that advertisement in *Les Petites Affiches* ? It means that Dulcamara the quack is in want of an organ-grinder with a diploma.

"Approach, my children," the mountebank was bawling. "Approach, lose no time. I have but a few moments to bestow upon you. I am wanted elsewhere. Kings and princesses sigh for my presence. Spanish hidalgos, who have eaten too much olla podrida—English milords, agonised by the spleen—refuse to be comforted without me. Grand Biribi—(this to the melancholy man with the diploma)—strike up the chanson à boire from Robert le Diable. After that we shall have something to say about the Imperial Soporific and Atomic Tincture of Honolulu."

An hour ago, in her recklessness, Lily might have been for a moment detained by the loquacity of this bombastic humbug. But it was too late now. The awful consciousness of her miserable

position had come upon her; and some inward voice kept thundering in her ears that she was in danger—from she knew not what; and that she must fly—she knew not where.

Exerting more strength than she had imagined she possessed, she contrived, at last, to disengage herself from the throng, and to reach a space which was less encumbered. She leant up against a tree, sick and faint. Her poor eyes were blinded with tears. Her strength had broken down. Her enterprise seemed to her, now, impossible of accomplishment. That dreadful fever was racking her head again. Heaven be merciful to her—what had she done, and what was she to do?

“Pretty little demoiselle, you seem ill,” a voice behind her said.

She had heard the voice before. It was that of the man who had declared that all weapons and umbrellas must be left at the door. She turned her head, trembling, and saw the Italian waxwork showman.

“Aha! you recognise me, then?” continued Signor Ventimillioni. “Do you know that I have been looking for you this half-hour?”

“I do not know you,” faltered Lily. “Good night!”

“Not so fast, picciolina mia. We are not to part in such a hurry.” And the Italian laid his hand on Lily’s arm.

"Let me go! let me go!" cried the terrified girl. "Let me go home."

"Precisely, that is where I am going to take you. There is a lady at home who is expecting you most anxiously. You have kept her waiting a very long time. Whole years. Home indeed. Aha! you little runaway!"

He tightened his grasp. He passed the other hand round her waist. Lily tried to scream, when, suddenly, some loose garment was thrown over her head, and another pair of hands were clasped over her mouth.

"Enough of this trifling," grumbled very hoarsely a man who had been lurking a few paces behind the Italian during his parley with Lily. "Come, my Phidias of the painting-room, bring the young toad along, or some sergent de ville will be passing by."

"Don't smother her, Demosthène," remonstrated the Italian. "Take the cloak off her head, and your hands off her mouth, and let us try to make her listen to reason. Des convenances, mon garçon; n'oublions jamais les convenances."

The second man did, sulkily, as he was bid, but he planted his great hands on Lily's shoulders, and kept them there. The girl was too terrified to speak; but palpitated in the grasp of the two ruffians like a captured bird.

"Listen to me, ma mie," went on the Italian,

putting his face so close to Lily that she could feel his beard upon her cheek ; "you are coming home with us. You are our prisoner, if you like that *tournure de phrase* better. Come quietly, and no harm will be done you ; but dare to call for assistance, and I will put this pretty little bodkin into you."

He drew, as quick as lightning, a long knife that glittered in the lamplight. Lily saw that she was lost. She could hear the distant hum of the crowd, and the clanging of the music ; but the spot was solitary, and she was beyond all human help.

"Will you be quiet, then ?" the Italian asked, half caressingly, half threateningly.

Lily murmured a faint affirmative.

"That's right. Now, Demosthène, let us take her between us. Don't forget that little bright bodkin of mine, little one."

The two strong men hooked their arms in those of the girl, and led her rapidly away. They plunged into an alley between the trees, and which seemed entirely deserted. But as though in mockery at her utter wretchedness and state of bondage, she saw gleaming from behind the tufted trees the first sparkle of the fireworks, those fireworks which were to culminate in a resplendent bouquet, in which Liberty was to have her annual apotheosis, and the twenty-seventh, twenty-eighth,

and twenty-ninth of July to be made glorious for ever.

They were now walking by the water-side. That it was the Seine Lily knew, for she could see the lamps on the Pont Louis Seize, and the Chamber of Deputies flaring with lampions. They stopped before a mean wooden building, having seemingly but one window, through whose dirty panes a light feebly glimmered.

The Italian pushed at the door, which gave way, and they passed in. There was a narrow passage, and by the light of a swinging cresset Lily could see a woman who was rushing towards her—a woman huddled in an old plaid shawl, whose hair was dishevelled, and whose face was painted. It was the Wild Woman of the Elysian Fields.




CHAPTER III.

THE SULTAN IN LONDON.

WHAT is a year? Psha! what are ten? When you are young, a year seems a very long time. That last month before you are twenty-one, or before you leave school, or get your commission, or pass your examination for the civil service, the month it takes for your moustaches to grow, how it lags, how it loiters, how every moment seems to have its feet clogged by leaden weights! Do our best as we may to squander the days in recklessness and prodigality, what a weary time elapses before we are thirty years of age, and fogies cease to tell us that, as young men, we should defer to the opinion of our elders. Never was there, perhaps, a sane woman of twenty-nine who passed herself off as thirty-one; but how often does a

young middle-aged man silyly add on a year or two ? But hey ! when the mezzo cammen is reached, how swiftly the years fly ! We lose count. Sixty-two melts into sixty-three, and that into sixty-four, without our special notice. Things pass as in a dream. The day before yesterday, why, it was eighteen months ago. Our newly-formed acquaintance, why we have known him these eight years. The far-off goal of grey hairs, and toothlessness, and the tomb, why we are close upon it. It was a tedious pull to Tattenham Corner ; it is a lightning rush to the judge's stand, even if we come in with the ruck.

A year had passed since the events previously narrated. Madame de Kergolay was dead. She passed away very peacefully, leaving the bulk of that which she possessed to her beloved grand-nephew, Edgar Greyfaunt. It was not much, but it was a capital to be turned into ready money, and that was all the young man wanted. It is due to the memory of the good old lady in Paris to state that she freely forgave poor little Lily before her death. Her ire, indeed, against the girl had lasted but a very short time. She had been shocked and pained by her disappearance, and had made every effort to gain tidings of her, but in vain. By degrees the vengeful pride which had led her to crush Lily with cruel words, because she had dared to love the Sultan, her grand-nephew, gave way to



her natural kindness and softness of heart. She wept and bewailed the fugitive. She would have sacrificed much to recover her. She acknowledged that Lily's love had been blameless. But she was gone, and would return no more.

The abbé, as in duty bound, informed Mademoiselle Marcassin of Lily's flight, and of the unavailing steps that had been taken to discover her hiding-place.

The Marcassin did not take the intelligence much to heart.


"I expected it," she remarked, coldly. "I, who am the greatest sufferer by the absconding of this vaurienne, would not spend three francs ten sous in an advertisement in the *Petites Affiches* to get her back. There are cats and cockatoos whom one is glad to lose, Monsieur l'Abbé. You and your Madame de Kergolay were entichés de cette petite friponne. Now she has robbed you as she robbed me, and has doubtless fled to join the swindler, her mother, with whom for years she has probably been in secret correspondence. Ah, ces Anglaises, ces Anglaises! c'est de la perfidie à en croire à la fin du monde. You had much better, instead of petting and spoiling her, have put her into a *Maison de Discipline*, where she would have been fed on bread and water, and whipped twice a week. The *Sœurs Grises* have an excellent institution at Auteuil. You say that she did not take her clothes with her.

Has your noble duenna counted her spoons since the flight of her darling?"

"I don't think the poor little child is dishonest," the abbé urged, in mild deprecation. He was a good man, after all, and much troubled in his mind about Lily.

"Bah!" sneered the inflexible Marcassin. "You take the whole world to be inhabited by candidates for the Prize of Virtue. Une fameuse Rosière elle ferait celle-là! The trumpery little thing was innately and incorrigibly bad. Mauvaise herbe, I tell you, Monsieur l'Abbé, mauvaise herbe."

And Madame de Kergolay died. To her two faithful servants she left a small but adequate provision, much to the distaste of Edgar; but of the rest he was sole legatee. Vieux Sablons faded away almost as quietly as his mistress from the stage. The old man did not survive Madame many months. He expressed, before he died, his wish to be buried in Père la Chaise, in the same grave with his beloved mistress, but crosswise, at her feet, as became an ancient and faithful but humble servitor. The abbé did his best to have his wish fulfilled; but there were difficulties in the way: the administration was not propitious, and Vieux Sablons had to be buried as many millions of his forerunners had been buried before him. It did not so much matter, perhaps. He was bound, let us hope, to a country where there is but One



Master, in whose eyes superiors and servitors are alike.

Edgar Greyfaunt, after passing a decent period in retirement at Aix-les-Bains—his great-aunt had died towards the close of the summer—where his exceedingly fashionable mourning, his jet studs and wrist-buttons, and the coal-black steed he rode, were deservedly admired, came back to Paris, settled accounts with Madame de Kergolay's notary—whom he accused, at many stages of their business transactions, of robbing him, and who did him the honour to remark, as he handed him the last packet of thousand-franc notes accruing from the dead lady's succession, that with a more heartless young man he had never come in contact—and called in an upholsterer from the Rue St. Louis, to whom, after a parley of ten minutes, he sold en bloc the entire furniture and fittings of his relative's apartments in the Marais: tapestry, china, pictures and all. "I do not want this rococo stuff," he said, candidly. "I was in England not many months since, and am returning there; and if I require brics-à-bracs I can get as many as I need in Wardour-street at cheaper rates than here."

The upholsterer handed three thousand francs to the Sultan Greyfaunt, and sent a couple of vans to carry away all the poor old lady's penates, which were worth six thousand at least. Big men in blouses dragged the faded Cupids, and shepherd-

esses, and bewigged gentlemen with the cross of St. Louis, down stairs. Gentil Bernard lay for a time in the gutter, and Babet la Bouquetière was calmly contemplated by a chiffonnier. A part of the furniture went very soon to decorate the rooms of a lorette, in the Rue Taitbout. When she had quarrelled with the English milord, through her over-weening partiality for the Brazilian coffee-planter, who turned out to be a swindler from Hamburg, she had a lavage, or sale of her knick-knacks, and some of Madame de Kergolay's penates were sold to the Jews, and some were bought by painters to increase the "properties" of their studios withal. Then in process of time they got burnt, or broken up, or pawned and sold and pawned again, or exported to America or Australia. Which is the way of the world, and not at all uncommon.


But the first van-load of goods had scarcely left the house of the deceased before Edgar Greyfaunt was snugly ensconced in the coupé of the diligence on his way to Calais. He began to think his mourning very hot and shabby looking. He must have an entirely new wardrobe when he reached London. Those French tailors did not know how to fit an English gentleman. Willis or Nugee should be honoured with his patronage. He was about to assume his proper position in society. He was destined to shine there, that was certain. He had an ancient name, a handsome presence, and a

fortune. Yes, quite a fortune. In a letter of credit on a London banking firm he was entitled to draw for no less a sum than five thousand pounds sterling. That was his entire capital—a hundred and twenty-five thousand francs. It sounded magnificent. Reduced to English sterling, it had not quite so sonorous a ring, but still with a great deal of spending in it. In his whole life the Sultan had never grasped so much money. His treasure seemed to him inexhaustible. He would live largely, luxuriously he thought, but then he would be adding to his capital. Was there not the turf; might not he, a young gentleman of fashion and fortune, make a figure there, and win thousands by betting? How much would it cost to have a stud of race-horses? And play! there was play. Hitherto, certainly, he had but rarely had a run of luck; but Fortune favours the bold, and he would have no need to distress himself about the loss of a few paltry hundreds of francs. And, if the worst came to the worst, was he not an artist? Had he not a commanding genius? Most commanding. Certainly, at no very distant date the portals of the English Royal Academy must open for his admission. But there would be plenty of time to take up with painting again. It was the last resource. To tell truth, he felt slightly ashamed of the easel and maulstick, now that he was an independent gentleman, with his pocket full of money. After all, it was but a

base mechanical employment this painting. How villanously the turpentine and megelp smelt. How difficult it was to find subjects; what a bore it was to have to make sketches. And those troublesome models—they cost ever so much money, and the colour merchant was always dunning for his bill. Those envious ill-conditioned fellows the critics, too, who made impertinent observations in print, for which, if they got their deserts, they should be caned, and who drew no distinction between a picture painted by the son of a cobbler and one that was the work of a descendant of the barons of old.

Of course Edgar put up at the Ship when he landed at Dover—the Lord Warden not being then built—and although he had the largest suite of apartments next to a Russian grand-duke who had crossed with him, the Ship was several sizes too small for the Sultan Greyfaunt. He would have posted to London had not the railway just been opened. He could never have endured a vulgar stage-coach.

He had plenty of friends, and some few distant connexions in London. It was known that he was Madame de Kergolay's heir. Nobody knew much about the old lady's circumstances, nor did the Sultan feel called upon to enlighten society with any particularity. It was noised abroad that he had inherited a large fortune; nor did he take any



special pains to contradict the rumour. If people chose to deceive themselves, why should they not be deceived? A convenient train of reasoning, which has been pursued in all countries these five thousand years about.

So where, when the Sultan arrived in the British metropolis, should his highness alight but at Pomeroy's Hotel in Great Grand-street, Grosvenor-square? He drove there straight from the terminus, and was received with much distinction. One had need be a distinguished foreigner to be welcomed in Great Grand-street. As a rule, Pomeroy (represented by a sharp Swiss named Jean Baptiste Constant, the successor to the original proprietor; he having retired on a fortune) only took in princes; and, equally as a rule, princes, when they came to town, were taken by their couriers to Pomeroy's. Mr. J. B. Constant (he was never called Monsieur now, and was supposed to be a naturalised British subject, and a staunch Protestant, the which did not prevent his entertaining the Sheikh of the Soudan, who was a Mussulman, and the Abbeokuta Envoy, who was black and a pagan, and was with difficulty persuaded from celebrating his "grand custom" over a footbath full of blood in the back drawing-room; besides any stray Romanist or Russo-Greek grandees who came that way)—Mr. J. B. Constant owed much of the success which he had hitherto enjoyed to his extended

connexion among the useful class of travelling servants known as couriers, who, when out of an engagement, or off duty, were always sure of a hearty reception, a good cigar, and a glass of curaçao, or other comforting stimulant in Pomeroy's still-room. The recommendations of an experienced member of the courier profession, one Franz Stimm, had been especially useful to Mr. Constant, and he was grateful to him accordingly.

Mr. Edgar Greyfaunt de Kergolay was therefore, as was only due to so high and mighty a prince, made much of at this patrician hostelry. On his cards he called himself Greyfaunt de Kergolay; and his name was surmounted by a neatly engraved and prettily spiked coronet. During the lifetime of his great-aunt, and in Paris, he had affected a disdain for his foreign lineage, and would own no blue blood but that of the Greyfaunts of Lancashire; but now that she was dead, and he had got her money, he thought there was no harm in hinting that he was the representative of a noble house from beyond the sea. Perhaps he found the Greyfaunts of Lancashire, like many other country families as noble, somewhat at a discount in London society, which, following the usual fashion, interested itself with what was passing on the extreme horizon in preference to that which was going on beneath its very nose. At all events, the lofty Edgar, when he was addressed as

Viscount, did not resent the error with any great acrimony. His old companions called him Greyfaunt; but many newly-found ones in cosmopolitan and diplomatic circles, spoke to him and asked him to dinner as De Kergolay. Under that title he was entered in Mr. J. B. Constant's books; and as De Kergolay he was inscribed, much more legibly, and, indeed, indelibly, in Mr. J. B. Constant's mind.

Thus, and in despite of his English face and tongue, being accounted that which imperfectly educated persons are apt to term a "foreign swell," Edgar—you may call him, and I will call him by either of his surnames indifferently—was naturally introduced to the Pilgrims' Club in Park-lane, at which, as everybody knows, or ought to know, the ambassadors, the secretaries of legation, and the attachés accredited to the court of St. James's, mingle on a charmingly social footing with sundry illustrious Englishmen, whose qualifications as Pilgrims must be simply these: to have travelled ten thousand miles in a straight direction, and in a given line from the North Pole; to be faultless hands at écarté, piquet, and short whist, and to belong to the cream of the cream of English society, both by wealth, by birth, and by position.

There are always a good many candidates up at the Pilgrims' Club—where gentlemen's names are put down when they are infants in arms, with a

view to their entering the club at their grand climacteric;—but as failures in one of the three grand and essential requisites are sometimes unavoidable, the rejection of candidates at the Pilgrims' Club (which is, I think, near the Piccadilly end of Park-lane) is not by any means of rare occurrence. Indeed, they say there is more black-balling at the P. (the affectionate diminutive of Pilgrim) than at any other club in London: always excepting the Ostrich in Sandys-street, Deseret-square. There, you know, they pilled Sir Eurasius Quihi for his loose notions on the subject of suttee, and all but ostracised brave old Admiral Sindbad, because he was known to maintain that curry was better without chutnee than with it. For distinctions must be made, it is plain, to keep society select—which would otherwise degenerate into a mere anarchical Odd Fellows' gathering of the most ungenteeled description: and it is a good and holy thing to be exclusive. Thus, as you see, the Pilgrims had secured the very cream of the cream in their English membership.

Well, and the foreigners. One must make allowances for foreigners, of course. If Baron Burstoff, Minister Plenipotentiary from Crim Tartary, had formerly been simply a Hebrew money-changer at Frankfort-on-the-Maine (the letters we used to have from him about the Imperial High Dutch lottery, and urging us forth-

with to invest in that swindle, and win a castle on the Rhine, the title of Count, and the entire library of the late lamented Puffendorff!); if old Professor Stradivarius from Jena, the distinguished philologist and translator of the poems of Saadi into the Zummerzethhire dialect, and the Post-Office London Directory of eighteen hundred and forty-two into Syro-Chaldaic, was the son of a tripe-dealer at Magdeburg, and had, in early life, followed the humble trade of a tailor; and if that famous traveller, Marcus Rolopolus, Ph.D., F.R.G.S., &c. &c., had been assistant-keeper of a wild beast show (travelling, and occasionally varied by the beefeater business outside), a dealer in stuffed birds in the vicinity of Goodman's-fields, and the proprietor of a sailors' boarding-house at Gibraltar, before he discovered the site of the lost city of Alesia, brought back the original pleadings of the Abderites in the great lawsuit of the ass's shadow, and made it manifest to the entire world that the wild Wangdoodlums do *not* eat human flesh when roast hippopotamus is procurable; and that they *do* knock out their front teeth to be the better able to whistle their native airs—if the savans and the illustrious strangers who were made free of the P., and nearly threw the waiters into fits by spitting on the carpet of the morning-room, were sometimes of mean extraction, and occasionally of coarse manners, and now and then humbugs, the great

principle of exclusiveness was at least outwardly vindicated. Once a Pilgrim always a Pilgrim; and the gown and scrip and sandalled shoon covered a multitude of sins.

Yes: the Sultan Greyfaunt had found his proper groove in life, and became it admirably. The groove was anointed with the most delicately scented unguent: pommade divine, at least. It was a groove beginning very high up indeed in the social scale, and you slid down it, as down that famous One Tree Hill of antiquity: Avernus.

After a time, Edgar left Pomeroy's Hotel. He did not complain of the costliness of its accommodation—(I think a mutton-chop costs a guinea there, and a bottle of soda-water three-and-sixpence, and I know a one-horse Brougham is two pounds ten an hour); but, intending to reside permanently in London, it was, of course, idle to remain in an hotel. So Mr. Constant, whom the Sultan deigned to patronise in the most benignant manner, found for his illustrious guest a handsome suite of chambers in St. James's-place; supplied him with a perfect pearl of a washerwoman, who enamelled shirts, iced white waistcoats, frosted pocket-handkerchiefs, and turned cravats into snow-flakes in the most beautiful manner; and, in addition, recommended him a body-servant—a very jewel of a body-servant—a young man by the name of Hummelhausen, said to be a distant rela-

tion of the proprietor of Pomeroy's, who shaved, dressed hair, varnished boots, compounded curious restoratives on the mornings after heavy dinners, found out the addresses of people whom he had seen but once in his life, and then only on the Serpentine's banks, played on the guitar, and was worth his weight in gold generally.

Could there be a more fortunate youth than the Sultan Greyfaunt, with his health, his figure, his genius, his ready money, his pearl of a laundress, his jewel of a body-servant, and his coronet upon his card? His name was down at the P. He often dined there. His election was considered certain, owing to the influence of Sir Timotheus O'Boy, that great collector of musical instruments, who is said to have nine of Father Schmidt's organs down at his place in Devonshire, and the original anvil beaten by the Harmonious Blacksmith in his smoking-room in Curzon-street. Some of the best houses in London were open to Edgar. Some of the prettiest faces in London smiled at him from carriage windows. "Oh king! live for ever!" cries the Eastern adulator. The Sultan Greyfaunt would have been but very slightly incensed with any adulatory person, Oriental or otherwise, who informed him that he, the Sultan, was destined to live for ever.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PILGRIMS AT RANELAGH.


I DON'T know whether they allow strangers to dine at the P. in these days. I am rather inclined to think they do not. Ultra exclusiveness tends in the long run to inhospitality, and Spaniards, through whose miserably shrivelled veins creeps the sangre azul, are sometimes reluctant to share their puchero with the best recommended stranger, fearful lest he should have less than ninety-seven quarterings on his scutcheon.

At all events, they dined outsiders at the P. twenty years since, and a very agreeable time the outsiders had of it. This may account for a certain round table in the Pilgrims' coffee-room being occupied on a certain evening in the winter of the Sultan's sojourn in London, by four guests, only two of whom were free and accepted Pilgrims.

Members first, if you please. There was our old friend Lord Carlton, much older, but not much the worse for wear. He had settled down and grown fat. Need anything more be said? Well, a little, perhaps. He was married, and her ladyship modelled wax flowers beautifully, and illuminated scrolls with "Thou shalt not steal," and "The tongue is an unruly member," in gold and colours, for ragged schools, in most superb style. She was rather too serious to be the wife of a reformed rake, and was given to lamenting her destiny, and exclaiming against the ingratitude of the world, when the juvenile pickpockets whom she had converted morally to a state of grace, and physically to be foot-pages, turned out failures, and absconded with the spoons; or when the awakened returned transport, whom she had promoted to be butler, was detected handing a blue bag containing Lord Carlton's court sword (broken short off at the hilt), a church service bound in purple velvet and gold, a silver vinaigrette, and fourteen yards of Valenciennes lace, over the area railings to Mrs. Fence, of Middlesex-street, late Petticoat-lane, by condition a widow, and by predilection pursuing the vocation of receiver of stolen goods. Lord Carlton, however, went his way, and her ladyship went hers.

His lordship bought pictures that were *not* by Titian, and, in his place in the House, was a very thorn in the side of the Royal Academicians and

the Trustees of the National Gallery. He had brought in a bill to abolish whistling in the streets, and to compel costermongers to say "asparagus" instead of "grass," when they cried that delicious esculent for sale. This measure had a succès d'estime, for it absolutely got read a second time, by accident, on a very hot Goodwood Cup day; and it was only in committee, and by the advice of a right reverend prelate, who, as the rumour ran, was a distinguished amateur of sibilation, and the only bishop who could dress asparagus with oil and tarragon vinegar after the recipe of Marie Antoinette's Cardinal de Rohan, that his lordship withdrew the bill, which had fluttered the Volscians, and dreadfully alarmed the London butcher-boys and itinerant vegetarians. A good man was my Lord Carlton, after a tempestuous youth. He owed a good deal of money, but he also gave away a good deal; and if Peter was damnified by his laches, Paul profited by his liberality. He went to sleep with commendable regularity at church, at the opera, in the House—save when the whistling and green-stuff business was afoot—at the club, in the green-rooms of the patent theatres, in the committee-room of the Royal Hospital for Plica Polonica (that beneficent institution which we owe to the ever-to-be-lamented Dr. Quackenboss, and at whose anniversary festivals a royal duke generally takes the chair), and at the board meetings of




the Elephant Life Assurance Association. Universally respected and beloved, a D.C.L., and lord-lieutenant in prospective of his county, Lord Carlton had probably little to wish for here below, save a little less gout, and a little more money to pay off his mortgages with. He had a literary turn, and had written a stinging article in a review, showing up would-be connoisseurs, who gave enormous sums for spurious Titians; and he was, just now, occupied in editing the family papers of the Carltons. As the first lord got his coronet through selling votes to Sir Robert Walpole, and the second earned a step in the peerage by selling votes to Mr. Pitt, and the third had cracked innumerable bottles with George the Fourth, much, very much was expected from the Carlton Papers.

And who was the second Pilgrim? Sir William Long. He was thinner, and paler, and looked taller, and men said his health was failing him. His hair was slightly grizzled, he ate little and drank less; he had a cough; and he smoked even more persistently than of yore. He was unmarried. He had travelled considerably since we saw him last, and fully earned his status as a Pilgrim. He had been east, and brought home narghilés, papouches, and attar of roses; he had been west, and returned with buffalo robes and moccasins, the antlers of elks, and the tails of beavers. His hunting-lodge was hung with the scalps of the Hours he had

killed; but he felt a little bored, even among the desiccated skull-caps of his slain enemies. They were dead; but what was he to do with the hours which were to come? He had become wealthier; but he spent little, so far as was known; drove, now, no four-in-hand; indulged in no elegant wickedness. The gossips whispered that the priests had got hold of him; that by his munificence had been endowed the new bishopric of Adrianopolis in partibus infidelium; that he had built the oratory of St. Gengulphus up in Northumberland; and that he would probably make an end of it as Brother Something or other, with peas in his shoes and spikes in his girdle. But you and I know what the whispers of the gossips are worth.


And the pair of guests? The Sultan Greyfaunt is before you. He was in his proper element: he was happy. The pearl of a washerwoman, and the jewel of a body-servant, had done all that was possible for him. The Sultan had a contented mind, and had fully made that mind up on the important subject of himself.

The *partie carrée* at the round table was completed by Tom Tuttleshell. I wish to state that Tom has been dead (worthy soul!) these five years, and that his mantle has not descended upon anybody. There are a great many people going about the world who would like to be Tom Tuttleshell, *but they can't manage it*. Only one Tuttleshell can



flourish in a generation, and the time of the next Tuttleshell has not come yet.

He was a florid little man, with such bright red hair and whiskers, such sparkling blue eyes, such gleaming white teeth, such a dazzling shirt collar, such mirror-like boots, and altogether in such a violent and inflammatory state of freshness, that he looked as though he had been boiled, starched, and mangled in a hurry. His hands were so ostentatiously clean, that you might have fancied (but that he was the most harmless fellow breathing) that he had been murdering somebody, and scrubbing his knuckles with a flesh-brush to get the blood off. In evening-dress he was superb, and wore the largest cleanest and stiffest white neckcloth to be seen out of a Wesleyan conference. In morning-dress his trousers were of so very large and pronounced a check as to give his legs the appearance of ambulatory draught-boards; and he wore, winter and summer, a white waistcoat, a black watch ribbon, and a white hat with a crape round it. I think that costume was the making of Tom. In it he was fit for any society. In that white waistcoat he had assisted at a ladies' committee (anti-slavery) in the gorgeous saloons of Sennacherib House. Often you might see the white hat, and snowy vest, and the rubicund perspiring face between them, on platforms at public meetings, down the yard at Tattersall's, and in the lobbies of the




Parliament House. They always let Tom into the Speaker's gallery of the Commons. I don't know why; but I conjecture in consequence of the hat and waistcoat. They looked so much as though they and their wearer had a right to go everywhere.

You met Tom Tuttleshell in all kinds of London penetralia, to the most exclusive. At the guard-mounting at St. James's you would find Tom in the centre of the hollow square, where the colours were, chatting to the dandy Guardsmen. At a review in Plumstead marshes, who was that individual in a white hat and waistcoat? Who was that bold civilian riding full split with the chief of the staff? That, by your leave, and by the chief's leave, too, who knows him, was Tom Tuttleshell. Tom was never in the commission of the peace—his commissions were of a very different nature—but you might behold him sitting on the bench, cheek by jowl with the Middlesex magistrates on licensing day. He was sure to turn up on the speech-days of the public schools, and at the collations afterwards. The swan-hopping excursions of the corporation of London; the term-feasts of the Honourable Society of Reynard's Inn (where you dined in a rusty black gown, drank hippocras, and were expected to drink, in Norman-French, to the health of the late Chief Justice Gascoigne); and especially the annual banquets of the Worshipful Com-

pany of Chain-mail Makers (nearly the last of the City companies who put five-pound notes under the plates of their guests, and cause their beadles to fill the hats of the company with macaroons and pine-apple jelly when they go away: such is the munificence of the Chain-mail Makers, whose Hall has not been rebuilt since the great fire, and whose paraphernalia is in the custody of the head waiter at the Star and Garter);—none of these festive gatherings would have been complete without the presence of Tom Tuttleshell. He sung so good a song, and told so good a story, that aldermen and baronets had been heard to regret, almost with tears in their eyes, that That Man was not something in the City, whereby he would infallibly have made his fortune. I believe that Tom *was* free of the Chain Makers, whose stock paid twenty-seven per cent., and that he lived upon his dividends. Others accounted for his means of livelihood by whispering the mysterious word “commission.” It was certain that, although Tom was always ready to borrow forty thousand pounds—at seven and a half per cent., not a penny more—for the Earl of Liveloose, he never borrowed any money himself. You could not call him a sponge; for though he was continually being asked to dinner, he never asked to be asked. You had no right to brand him as a tuft-hunter, for he toadied nobody, and made himself sought by, without seeking the company of,

the great. The malevolent, only, could hint, with a sneer, that Tom's mother must be a washerwoman and his father a cab proprietor, so very white and profuse was his linen, and so very frequently was he to be seen scurrying from the West-end to the City in a Hansom. Being a very little man, he naturally carried, at all places of public entertainment, a very big opera-glass; and it was highly edifying to watch him at the opera or the theatre, on the first night of a new dancer or a new play, apparently engaged in sighting a brace of Armstrong guns linked together. You could scarcely sweep the vista of the hill at Epsom or the grand stand at Ascot, without your eye lighting on Tom and the big opera-glass, sitting in the high places, or planted, Colossus of Rhodes-like, on the top of a four-in-hand. He went behind the scenes of all the theatres; and many a manager owed his temporary rescue from ruin to Tom Tuttleshell's friendly offices in the way of letting stalls and private boxes. He was free of a great many newspaper offices, and of a great many newspapers too, to judge from the neatly-folded and banded copies which were handed to him by bowing publishers when he took his weekly trot down the Strand every Saturday afternoon. He went frequently to Paris, and consorted with the best people there, both English and French. He was a confidential creature. When Sir John Brute, who adored his wife, and was in the habit of



beating her black and blue, had been unusually obstreperous, her ladyship always called in Tom Tuttleshell, and he seldom failed to induce penitence in the heart of the offending husband. He had saved Mrs. Lightfoot from committing suicide, after the discovery by her jealous spouse of Captain Tenstun's miniature in her writing-case; and when Mrs. Majolica Potts threw the tea-things at her husband's head, and he retorted by casting china images at her, and the children, terrified by the quarrels of their parents, cast themselves in wild confusion down the nursery stairs, Tom was always called in to restore peace to that distracted household. Thus, welcome everywhere, and doing harm to no man, was Tom Tuttleshell. He was not literary; but had once written a song, in aid of the funds of a fancy fair, and dedicated by permission to Mrs. Hiram Hyem Higgs (great banking family). He was not artistic; yet was supposed to have a keen eye for the old masters, had once been examined as a witness before a Fine Art committee, and was absolutely alluded to in a Fine Art debate, when the report was brought up in the Commons, as "a gentleman of well-known taste." He was no great politician; but he was sure, at election-time, to be on the Conservative candidate's committee. He was neither financial nor commercial, though he was always very anxious about the price of consols, shook his head when Venezuelan

bonds were mentioned, and had been seen in Upper Thames-street attentively regarding a sample of Patna rice in the outstretched palm of an eminent wholesale grocer. "I ask you, Tom, as a fellow who knows what's what, if that's *rice*?" the grocer was heard to say. He was undeniably respectable; but nobody knew precisely where he lived. He was supposed to have a bedroom at an hotel in Jermyn-street, and chambers in Reynard's Inn, and an office in Gideon-court, Sampson-lane, Cornhill. Yet, granting this slight amount of mystery, not a breath of suspicion rested on the fair fame of Tom Tuttleshell, for he had been seen lunching on turtle at Birch's with a governor of the Bank of England, and was currently reported to have an audience with the prime minister every morning, when the pilot who guided the ship of state was engaged in the pleasant occupation of shaving. These things become known, and do a man good.

The Pilgrims' dinner had reached that agreeable stage when men begin to trifle with the cates before them; to be critical about the wine-biscuits they nibble; to inspect contemplatively the chequers in their Madras napkins; to be deeply interested in the hinges of their nut-crackers; to peer curiously into the shells of their filberts, and when they find a withered one to utter a fat sigh, half in the complacency of processive digestion, and half as though they were reflecting: "Such is life:"—then to

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whisk imaginary crumbs from off their knees; then to pull their wristbands and adjust their collars; then to find more flavour in the Chambertin—"A very delicate, yet sound wine, Tuttleshell." "I wish I had a quarter cask of it, my lord"—than ever the wine-merchant put into it; then to admit that, after all, the old Saxon families surpass the so-called Norman race in purity of blood and antiquity of lineage. "I would rather be Cedric the Saxon than Philippe de Malvoisin," says Lord Carlton, finding two beeswings in his port instead of none: to which Tom Tuttleshell, whose grandfather was the Lord knows whom, cheerfully assents; and, finally to yawn, and to think that a mild cigar and a glass of Seltzer with something in it, would be about the summum bonum of human felicity. Don't let me hear you say that there are few hours of unmixed happiness in life, or repeat that trash, that man never is but always to be blest. Man is blest when he is asked to dine at the Pilgrims'. The chef would impale himself on his own spit if he heard that any one had been compelled to take carbonate of soda after one of his dinners; the cellar is so good that there is not a headache in the whole of it; and black care never sits behind the horseman who puts his legs in the mahogany stirrups of that friendly club. No British wife is ever angry with her husband for being bidden to dine at the Pilgrims'; pre-

cisely as no British husband (save a monster) would deny his wife a cheque if she were about to be presented at court, and lacked jewellery or lace.

"But the question is," said Lord Carlton, as they rose from table in beaming mood; "the question is, where shall we go?"

"Strangers can't play cards," remarked Sir William Long.

"Hate cards," added Lord Carlton.

"They are stupid things at best," observed the Sultan, loftily. "Give me hazard."

The baronet looked at him. "You must have oceans of money, Mr. Greyfaunt," he observed.

"Not much, but enough," Edgar replied, with something akin to a blush.

"I am glad to hear it. People call me rich; yet I daren't play at hazard."

"You played too much when you were young, Long," his lordship, who was conscious that Edgar was not very well pleased with the remark, interposed. "Greyfaunt will soon have enough of hazard. It's like rowing. When a fellow begins to know something about it, it's time for him to leave it off. But still, all this by no means helps us to settle the question, 'Where shall we go?'"

"I shall go home," Sir William Long said, wearily.

"You've no home to go to, most misanthropic

bachelor, except those dreary chambers in the Albany, where you bury yourself to smoke cigars twenty times too strong for you, and read Crebillon the Younger, or Butler's Lives of the Saints. Why on earth don't you fall in love and marry?"

"I never was in love but once," the baronet made answer, gravely, "and that was with a little girl scarcely nine years old. I don't think I could marry her; for I am grey and broken, now; and she must be a young woman by this time."

"Was the attachment reciprocal?"

"I think so. I never saw her but once in my life; but I gave her some sugar-plums, and she let me kiss her at parting."

"What was her christian name—sans indiscretion?"

"Lily."

Edgar Greyfaunt pricked up his ears. "Why, I knew a little girl called Lily," he cried, "and not so long ago, either."

"Not such a very uncommon name," yawned Lord Carlton.

"My aunt adopted a poor relation," put in Thomas Tuttleshell, "whose name was Hannah; but she was a sentimental woman was my aunt, and changed the girl's name to Lily."

"A most interesting piece of family history,"

sneered his highness, who misliked, he scarcely knew why, the universally popular Thomas. "Have you many poor relations, Mr. Tuttle-shell?"

"Plenty," answered Tom, cheerfully. "The very poorest of my poor relations has had the honour of making a fourth at a very pleasant dinner-party at the Pilgrims' Club, Park-lane, this very evening." Hereby Tom managed to kill two birds with one stone; to give Greyfaunt a Rowland for his Oliver; and to pay Lord Carlton, who was the *Amphitryon*, a neat little compliment. Yet the good fellow winced somewhat as he replied to the young man. He knew all about Mr. Edgar Greyfaunt. "Why should that brainless puppy insult me?" he thought. "Here's a peer of the realm and a rich baronet. *They* never say anything rude to me; yet here's a stuck-up young jackanapes, who's burning the candle at both ends, and in six months won't have a penny of his old aunt's money, has never a civil word to throw at Tom Tuttle-shell. Well: it don't much matter. *He'll* never get on." Tom never bore malice; and to prophesy that a man would never get on, was the severest censure he ever passed on the conduct of an enemy.

"The question," resumed Lord Carlton, anxious to put an end to an embarrassing discussion, "again resolves itself into, 'Where shall we go?'"

They were donning their great-coats in the hall.

"Come home and smoke with me," suggested the baronet.

"We will smoke, and not go home with thee, hermit of the passage between Piccadilly and Burlington-gardens:" thus Lord Carlton. "We know how it would end. Three o'clock in the morning, a discussion on the Cosmic Principle in Nature; Greyfaunt losing his temper, and challenging us all to fight duels before breakfast; nervous affections brought on by excessive indulgence in tobacco; and Tom Tuttleshell asleep with his head in the coal-scuttle."

"Come and play lansquenet at my rooms," proposed the Sultan. He knew that Tom never played, and would go away (which was the very thing he wanted) if the invitation were accepted; and he would have been delighted to entertain a peer and a baronet, even if he lost money to them.

"Long has forsworn lansquenet, and I prefer whist," objected his lordship. "Can no one propose something else?"

"Why, there are plenty of places to go to," said Thomas, who saw that his peculiar office was now in request, but who had prudently bided his time until the invention of his superiors was exhausted. You must not be obtrusive with the lion, even if

you be a jackal. Wait until king Noble begins to scratch his mane with a puzzled air, and turns an inquiring eye towards you. Then you may hint to his majesty, but very discreetly, where you think the nicest antelope is to be found.

"Places to while away an hour positively abound," pursued the diplomatic Thomas. "Will you take a cab down to Pentonville, and see the Grecian? A monstrous queer place, I can assure you. I took an English duke and the Hospodar of Moldavia (who insisted on wearing a false nose, thinking there was a masquerade) there one night, and they enjoyed themselves immensely. Don't care about going so far? Will you be my guests at a humble little club in Frith-street, Soho? It is club night. Brattles will be in the chair. You know Brattles, the well-known sculptor of Satan putting on the Serpent's Skin. There will be some capital singing, and you'll meet some of the first wits of the day. I'll introduce you all as Manchester men, if Mr. Greyfaunt chooses to hide his artistic candle under a bushel."

"I should like to go very much indeed," said Sir William Long.

The Sultan Greyfaunt demurred, on the plea that they would probably be bored. The Sultan would have dearly liked to strangle Tom Tuttle-shell for that ill-timed allusion to his artistic genius.

“Try again, Tom,” said Lord Carlton, who was thinking what her serious ladyship would say if she even heard of the expediency of visiting these wild haunts of dissipation being mooted.

“Well, there’s Evans’s; but it’s too early. There’s a new farce at the Lyceum—Potatoes and Pool, or the Can and the Cannon Game; but I know the French piece, and the man who has done it into English; and both are stupid. What do you say to a visit to Ranelagh?”

“Ranelagh! why I haven’t been there for ten years!” exclaimed Sir William.

“Ranelagh! Why it’s mid-winter, and as cold as charity,” said Lord Carlton.

“Where *is* Ranelagh?” asked the Sultan Greyfaunt, with engaging simplicity.

“Southwark Bridge-road, half a mile from the Asylum for Club-foot; two-shilling cab fare,” rapidly pursued Thomas. “As to its being winter, that will be just the fun of it. M’Variety, the manager, who took the lease when poor Benjamin Raphael went to the bad, and who is a fellow of infinite resources, was the first man to hit on the ingenious notion of opening Ranelagh in winter. The statues in the Archipelagean walk are covered up with straw, it is true, but they’re beautifully lighted. The trees are leafless, but there’s no end to the additional lamps. There’s an artificial skating-pond, and a Galop Infernal on skates, with

a full band, at ten o'clock. The lake's boarded over, and the Panorama of Seringapatam has been turned into Moscow at the time of the French invasion. It will be set on fire punctually at eleven; and Bandenessi, the great gymnast, dressed as the Emperor Napoleon, will cross from the Kremlin to the Church of St. Ivan on the tight rope, and in the midst of a shower of fireworks."

"Accomplished Tom, you speak like a book," said Lord Carlton.

"Or a play-bill," good naturedly suggested Mr. Greyfaunt.

"You're not far wrong there," returned Thomas, with a dry laugh, "for I help M'Variety (who is an old ally of mine) every week to make out his programmes. Come, my lords and gentlemen. Shall it be Ranelagh? The price of admission has been reduced from half-a-crown to one shilling. There are a concert-room, a dancing pavilion, an exhibition of waxworks direct from Paris, and the property of the celebrated Florentine anatomical artist Signor Ventimillioni. There are the Wolocrini family—the Bounding Brothers of the Western Prairies; there is a ballet-theatre; and finally there is a circus, where Madame Ernestine, the celebrated equestrian, will perform on her trained charger Constant, dressé à la haute école, the bills say, although what that may be I have not the slightest notion. We shall be just in time to see her."

“Constant! that’s an odd name for a horse. Poor Frank Blunt—Griffin Blunt they used to call him: he came to a sorry end in Paris the other day—used to have a man called Constant. Deuced clever fellow he was, too. Dressed hair and made curaçao punch wonderfully. Robbed his master, I dare say. No, I think Blunt must have robbed him. A shocking rip was Frank, poor fellow.”

“There is a man called Constant who keeps Pomeroy’s Hotel, where I stayed when I came to town,” Edgar remarked, in reply to Lord Carlton. The nobleman had sent away his Brougham, and the baronet his cab, which were waiting at the club door, by this time; and the distinguished quartet, ensconced in a humble four-wheeled cab, were on their way to the famous gardens of Ranelagh. “I wonder whether it’s the same Constant? These valets often save money and set up hotels.”

“There is a river in Macedon, and there is a river in Monmouth,” observed Sir William Long, “and I can’t see what your Constant or anybody’s Constant has to do with the lady’s horse at Ranelagh. I wonder who this Madame Ernestine is? These horse-riding women change their names so often. I know there is one of them whom I should like to find.”

CHAPTER V.

HIGH SCHOOL OF HORSEMANSHIP.

RANELAGH! Ranelagh! Are you quite sure? Ranelagh? Is the word no misprint, no clerical error? I think I hear the judicious critic ask this question as he reads the last chapter of this story, scratching his ear meanwhile. Then, he may haply fling the book by, altogether. Ranelagh! Come, this exceeds human patience. Had I said White Conduit House, that might have been barely tolerable. But Ranelagh! Why, that was a place whither Horace Walpole went when he was a beau, and the Miss Gunnings when they were belles. It was altogether an eighteenth-century place, devoted to periwigs, hoops, powder, patches, brocaded sacks, clocked hose, high-heeled shoes, fans, small-swords, cocked-hats, and clouded canes. Our great-grand-


mothers went to Ranelagh in sedan-chairs, and attended by little black boys. A certain Mrs. Amelia Booth (wife of a captain in a marching regiment, and known to a certain Mr. Henry Fielding) supped there one night, more than a hundred years ago, in company with a clerical gentleman who had a few words during the evening with a British nobleman.

To which I reply that I know what I am about, and that there is reason in the roasting of eggs. The place of amusement to which the Pilgrims repaired, after dining so well in Park-lane, shall be Ranelagh, if you please. This is an age in which the exercise of some discretion in literature is necessary. Your contemporaries will forgive everything but the naming of names. You may write and say the thing which is *not*; but beware of giving utterance to that which *is*. You know that the Memoirs of the candid Talleyrand are not to be published until full thirty years have elapsed from the period of his lamented death. Some few of the contemporaries of Charles Maurice, who might be compromised, are still alive; and the candid creature could be discreet, even in the tomb. For a similar reason, the place I have in my eye shall be Ranelagh. There are numbers of ladies and gentlemen still extant, and flourishing like green bay-trees, who have heard the chimes at midnight in Ranelagh's leafy orchards, and have occasionally taken slightly more lobster-salad than

was good for them in those recesses. So, let the place I have in my eye be Ranelagh; though, if you choose to get a private Act of Parliament, or the Royal Permission, or a License from the Heralds' College, or to exercise your own sweet will, there is nothing to prevent your calling it Tivoli, or Marylebone, or Spring Gardens.



Besides, did not a gentleman, a few pages since, make the profoundly philosophical, if not entirely original remark, that there was a river in Macedon and a river in Monmouth. How many Ptolemys were there? There may have been Ranelaghs and Ranelaghs. All were not necessarily patronised by Horace Walpole and the Miss Gunnings. Is there not a London in Middlesex, and a London in Canada? A Boulogne in the department of the Seine, and a Boulogne in the department of the Pas de Calais? An Aix in Savoy, an Aix in Provence, and an Aix in Rhenish Prussia? An Alexandria in the land of Egypt, and an Alexandria in the state of Virginia?

At all events, all the Ranelaghs are gone by this time—your Ranelagh and my Ranelagh. Yes; the pleasant place is departed. The fifty thousand additional lamps are fled, and the garlands of flowers, real and artificial, are dead. The plaster statues have reverted to dust and their primitive gypsum; the trees have been cut down; their very roots grubbed up. Bricks and mortar invade the once



verdant expanse of the Ramilies ground. No more balloons ascend from that Campus Martius. There are wine-cellars where once the lake was; pantries and sculleries where once the panorama of Moscow raised its cupolas of painted canvas, profusely festooned with squibs and crackers, to the starlit sky. Pulled down, laid waste, and laid out again: such has been the fate of Ranelagh. Its present desolation of hods, scaffold-poles, and places where rubbish may be shot, seems even more dreadful than would be utter solitude and silence. Somebody Else—that ruthless and immovable Somebody Else—has got hold of Ranelagh, and turned it to other uses. May it, under its new aspect, be profitable to Somebody! It is certain that Ranelagh, as Ranelagh, never did pay Anybody.


Is it necessary to shed a few sympathetic tears over the parterres, the fountains, the umbrageous alleys, the labyrinths and grottos, the supper-arbours, the long ball-room—over the orchestra with its shell-shaped sounding-board, and the little hutch beneath, where you purchased the creaming stout in brown jugs which might once have been Toby Philpots, and have lived in the vales? I should like so to weep, a little; but, unfortunately, there is no time to weep. The Pilgrims and Madam Ernestine, professor of the high school of horsemanship, are waiting. Let others mourn the fiddlers who were wont to wear the cocked-hats;



the tipsy, fraudulent waiters, alternately cringing and abusive; the masters of the ceremonies, humble disciples of the school of the immortal S——; the money-takers; the gipsy fortune-teller and the prophetic hermit. They were all worthy folk, no doubt, but have disappeared. So have the petrified fowls at five shillings each, the ham cut so thin that it resembled the leaves of some fatty sensitive plant, and curled into shrinking convolutions when you touched it; the rack punch, so called from its fumes inflicting on you next morning the worst tortures of the Tower of London and the Spanish Inquisition; and that remarkable rose-pink champagne which never went round more than once, and never cost less than half a guinea a bottle.


It was M'Variety who, as Tom Tuttleshell correctly observed, had hit upon the notable device of opening Ranelagh in the winter, and at a shilling a head. The experiment was disastrous—every experiment ended, in the long run, at Ranelagh in catastrophe—but its commencement was not destitute of a certain brilliance. Thomas Tuttleshell had done M'Variety much good since the beginning of the winter season. He had made up many parties, and brought many lords there. He had interested himself with editors, and affably presided at a supper of the élite of intellect held to inaugurate the artificial skating pond. In fact, with the exception of the capitalist in the wine trade, who

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was losing his weekly hundreds in backing the manager of Ranelagh, Thomas Tuttleshell was M'Variety's dearest friend.

The manager was standing at the water-wicket, keeping, as was his custom, a very sharp look-out both on the pay-place and the free list box, as the party from the Pilgrims' Club alighted from their cab. It may be imagined how many cordial pressures of the hand he bestowed on Tom, and how many sweeping bows he favoured his illustrious visitors with. M'Variety was a man in a chronic state of bankruptcy, but who constantly arose, smiling and cheerful, as though refreshed by ruin. There never was, perhaps, a debtor who was so much beloved by his creditors. Those to whom he owed most were generally the first to help him to start afresh. It was the opinion of the capitalist in the wine trade—an opinion frequently expressed as he signed the weekly cheques—that it was no good crying after spilt milk; that a man could not eat his cake and have it; that you could not always be turning over your money ten times a year; and that there was a deal of meat on M'Variety yet. "Sir," the enthusiastic capitalist would exclaim, "if Ranelagh was to be swallowed up by an earthquake next Saturday night, Mac would have the neatest bill about the ruins (as patronised by royalty) to be seen at three o'clock in the afternoon and nine o'clock at night, out in Sunday's paper, that ever



you saw. He is a man of spirit, sir, is Mac." So the capitalist went on signing cheques and sending in cases upon cases of the rose-pink champagne.

M'Variety always looked after his small liabilities, and let the large ones take care of themselves. He who would owe much, and yet live undisturbed, should always pay his washerwoman. It is astonishing when you owe a man thirty-seven thousand pounds to find how eager he is to ask you to dinner, and to lend you another three thousand pounds to make up the round sum. Mac always paid his small people. He never treated his underlings to an empty treasury. The ghost walked regularly at Ranelagh at three o'clock on Saturday afternoon, however spare the promenaders on Friday night might have been. Thus it came about that the small folks loved M'Variety, and that the master carpenter, to whom he had presented a silver snuff-box for his exertions in getting up the firework scaffolding for the panorama of Moscow, declared, with tears in his eyes, that the governor was the honestest soul he ever drove a nail for, and that if timber ever ran short in the gardens, he'd cut down Bushey Park (at the risk of transportation for life) sooner than the governor should want it. And finally, as Mac, whether it was hail, rain, or sunshine with him, always entertained a retinue of old pensioners, and took great care of an old grandmother (who considered him the brightest genius

of any age) and two spinster sisters down in Devonshire, he was not, perhaps, on the whole, such a bad sort of a fellow.

"Tiptoppers?" whispered the manager to his friend, as he bustled officiously in advance of his guests.

"The very first," Thomas returned. "An earl, a baron, and a foreign count: no end of a swell. The conceited puppy," he added, mentally, to compensate for his slightly imaginative eulogium on Edgar Greyfaunt. It was a harmless peculiarity of our friend that he always gave his aristocratic acquaintances a step in rank. Thus, if you were a captain, he spoke of you as colonel; if you were an archdeacon, he made you a bishop.

"Sure I'm very much obliged to you, Tom," went on M'Variety. "Come and chop on Sunday?"

"Thanks. Can't promise, but we'll see."

"Well, I know you will if some other swell doesn't turn up. This way, gentlemen. You're just in time for the circus. Just a goin' to begin, as the showman said."

"Who is this Madame Ernestine, Mr. M'Variety?" asked Sir William Long, quitting Lord Carlton's arm to walk with the manager.

"Famous French equestrian, my lord. Just arrived from Paris. Turned all the people's heads there. Pay her a tremendous salary."

"I am Sir William Long," the baronet said,

quietly, "and should be very much obliged if you would tell me anything definite about this Madame Ernestine. I am very curious, indeed, to learn."

The manager indulged in a subdued—a very subdued—whistle. He glanced at the baronet's face, and saw that it wore an expression of earnest curiosity.

"Well, she ain't young, Sir William," he made answer.

"If she is the person I mean, she must be forty years of age, or thereabouts."

"You may bet your money on *that* horse, Sir William," acquiesced the manager. "Hope you'll excuse my familiarity, but I've always found the swells most affable. His Grace the Duke of Darbyshire comes here twice a week, thanks to my friend Tom Tuttleshell. Invaluable fellow, Tom. His grace wanted to drive his four-in-hand over the artificial lake, but I was obliged to refuse him, for fear of accidents, and the newspapers, and that sort of thing. Ah! you've no idea what a hard life mine is, and what a manager has to put up with. Those licensing magistrates are enough to worry one into the grave. Only think. That stupid old Serjeant Timberlake, the chairman, was nearly giving a casting vote against our shop, on the ground that skating was immoral, and that coloured lamps led to drinking."

"Believe in my sympathy, Mr. M'Variety; but this Madame Ernestine, now. You say that she is not young?"

"She's no chicken, and that's a fact; but this is, of course, *entre nous*. Ladies in her profession are never supposed to grow old."

"Is she handsome?"

"Makes up uncommonly well at night; doesn't spare the 'slap,' you know, the red and white," responded Mr. M'Variety, diplomatically.

"Can you tell me anything more about her? I have a particular object in inquiring, far beyond any impertinent curiosity."

"All communications strictly confidential, eh? Well, I don't mind telling *you*, Sir William, though it's against my rules. My standing orders to my stage-door keeper, when any questions are asked *him* by parties—and some have been asked by the very first in the land—about the ladies and gentlemen of the company, is to tell 'em to find out, and, if they ain't satisfied with *that*, to write to Notes and Queries. That generally satisfies the Paul Prys, and you don't know how we're bothered with 'em. Now, to tell you the honest truth about Madame Ernestine, she's about the most mysterious party I ever knew, and I have known a *few* mysterious parties in my time, Sir William."

"I have no doubt of it, Mr. M'Variety; pray proceed."

"I can't make out whether she's a Frenchwoman or an Englishwoman. She speaks one language as well as the other. She swears like a trooper, and drinks like a fish, which ain't very uncommon in the horse-riding profession; but then she gives herself all sorts of fine-lady airs, and treats you as if you were a door-mat. She says she was married to a tremendous swell, an Englishman, who is dead, and that she is a lady in her own right. My treasurer, Van Post, won't believe it, and you'd find it rather hard to meet with a sharper customer than Billy Van Post. 'If she's a lady,' says he, 'why don't she go to her relations?'"

"Is she talented?"

"Clever as Old Scratch, to whom, I think, she's first cousin. But, to tell you the honest truth, Sir William, she's too old for the kick-out business. At her time of life, the swells don't care about seeing her jump through the hoops. It's time for her to cover up her ankles, Sir William. Tom Tuttleshell told her so, and she offered to knock him down for it; but we got her to listen to reason at last. You see, Tom found her out for me in Paris, and I pay her a thumping salary."

"But does it pay you to do so?"

"That's just it, Sir William. You'd hardly credit it, but it does pay tremendously. That ingenious fellow, Tom Tuttleshell, put me up to the dodge of the high school of horsemanship

which he had seen at Franconi's. It's as easy as lying," pursued the candid Mr. M'Variety, "and it ain't far off from lying, anyway."

"What may this novel invention be?"

"Just this: You've got a lady rider that's clever—first-rate, mind, but passy. Well, you just put her into a riding-habit and a man's hat, and you give her a trained horse and a side-saddle, and she makes him go through all kind of capers to slow music, and the audience they go half wild with excitement. It's a new thing, Sir William, and tickles 'em. The British public are very capricious, and have got tired of the Three Graces on one horse, and the Swiss Shepherdess on her milk-white steed, and such like."

"And the high-school horse?"

"Perfection. When Tom first dug out Madame Ernestine in Paris, she was very low down in the world, going round the fairs, I have heard say, as a spotted girl, or a mermaid, or a giantess, or something not worth five-and-twenty bob a week, at all events. She was quite broken, in fact, and good for nothing but to make play with the brandy-bottle. Well, Tom saw there was something in her, and that she was exactly the kind of party for the high-school business, and he managed to pick up a horse from an Italian fellow that kept a wax-work show—Venti something his name was; and that horse and the Madame have turned me in a

pretty penny since I opened. I wish everything else in the gardens had turned out as profitably," M'Variety added, with a half-sigh.

"And the Madame, as you call her, is a success?"

"Draws tremendously. As I warned you, she's no great shakes as to youth or good looks; but for pluck, action, and general 'go,' that woman," the manager continued, confidentially, "may be considered a Ripper. Fear! She doesn't know what fear is. Five-barred gates! She'd take the wall of the King's Bench Prison, chevaux-de-frise and all, and leap over the Surrey Hills into the bargain. She's a Ripper, Sir William, and nothing but a Ripper."

"Is she alone—I mean, does she live alone?"

"Yes and no. Husband's dead, so she says. That I told you. The waxwork Italian says he's her uncle, but he's abroad. She has a fresh servant about once every fortnight, after she's broken the old one's head with a water-jug. Barring that, I think she's alone. Stay, there's a little chit of a girl that lives with her—a niece, or cousin, or dependent of some kind, though Billy Van Post, my treasurer, will have it that she's the Madame's daughter. A quiet little girl she is, and would be pretty if she wasn't so thin and pale. Like a little ghost she is. The Madame leads her an awful life."

“And the name of this little girl?”

“There you ask more than I can tell you. My wife calls her a little angel, and the people about the gardens have nicknamed her Cinderella. She gets more kicks than halfpence from the Madame; and I sometimes feel inclined to interfere, only we like to leave these foreign horse-riders to themselves as much as we can. The Madame has a devil of a temper. Twice I’ve been obliged to go bail for her good behaviour at Lambeth Police Court, after she and the water-jug and her dressers have fallen out.”

“It is the Countess,” thought Sir William Long. “Poor little Lily!” To Mr. M’Variety he went on, abstractedly: “It is pretty, very pretty indeed.”

The conversation to which I have striven to give coherent sequence, had in reality been made up of disjointed fragments strewn about by the voluble M’Variety as they wandered through the gardens. Long before its close they had entered the wooden pavilion fitted up as a circus, and ensconced themselves in the manager’s own private box. Here Lord Carlton, after expressing to Tom Tuttleshell his opinion that M’Variety was a worthy, a very worthy fellow, went placidly to sleep. Tom, who was one of the most placable of creatures, and had quite forgotten Edgar’s offensive manner towards him, would have been very happy to entertain the

young man with a lively description of everything and everybody connected with Ranelagh ; but the Sultan chose to continue superciliously sulky, and Tom, seeing that he was merely wasting his words, slipped out of the box, and had a walk round the gardens, where he found numbers of people who felt amazingly flattered and patronised by his condescending to talk to them.

Sir William Long was too much engaged with his own thoughts to notice the departure of Tom, or of the polite manager, who, when his guests were seated, withdrew to see after one of his thousand-and-one concerns about the gardens. Between the slumbering peer and the simpering dandy—who was looking at the audience in the hope, and with the expectation, that they were looking at and admiring him—Sir William Long had ample scope to think. The memories came rushing over him. In the desert of a misspent life two or three oases started up. His remembrance went back to a dinner at Greenwich, to a little timid girl he had petted, and made playful love to, to a kiss he had printed on her forehead. How many years had passed since that dinner, and yet how many hundreds of times he had recalled it ; how vividly he could recal its minutest incidents, now ! Why ? It was but an ordinary tavern festival. He had been at scores of similar revelries, in company as good, as bad, or as indifferent, since. There had

been nothing about it out of the common. Nothing but the child who had sat by his side. And what was she to him: to him, a gentleman of wealth, title, and ancient descent? If she lived, and were indeed this Ernestine's dependent, she could scarcely be a woman even now, and he was worn and grizzled. Why should his thoughts revert, again and again, to the childish playmate—the playmate but of an hour—whom he had kissed in the tavern hall?

“Here is the *high* school of horsemanship,” remarked Mr. Greyfaunt. “What a dreadful old harridan in a riding-habit to be sure! She looks like Queen Boadicea addressing the ancient Britons.”

The Swiss Shepherdess had whirled round the arena on her milk-white steed, scattering artificial flowers out of a kind of decorated milk-pail, and casting quantities of pulverised tan into the eyes of the groundlings. The Three Graces, in very short skirts, and somewhat faded fleshings, had likewise made the circuit of the ring on their solitary steed. The clown had uttered his usual dreary witticisms; and his colleague, rival, and deadly foe, a French grotesque, attired in garments of parti-coloured hue, had tied himself into several knots, grinned between his legs, knocked the back of his head against the small of his back, and uttered the customary ejaculations of “La, la!” to the immense delight of the audience. French grotesques were

novelties in those days, and the mountebank in question was exceedingly popular.

The legitimate British clown stood apart, watching the gyrations of his alien competitor with intense disgust.

"*That* fit for a Hinglish king, is it?" muttered the Briton. "*That's* the sort of thing that's to go down at Windsor Castle, before the r'yal fam'ly and the nobility and gentry. It's enough to make a fellow take to the busking game, or turn Methody parson at once. I'd rather be a barker to a shoe-shop in the Cut than demean myself like that."

Here the volatile foreigner, whose head was turned by success, and who was plainly presuming on his popularity, came up to our British friend with his tongue out and "I say, mistare—" The clown, whose cockscomb was out of joint, administered to him the kick of contempt, a little harder than he would have done to an English colleague, and grumbling, "I'll punch your 'ed after the fireworks, see if I don't," submitted to be touched up by the riding-master's whip, to thrust his hands into the pockets of his pantaloons, turn in his toes, make a grimace, and to propound, for the seventeen-hundredth time, one of the seventeen conundrums he had carefully studied from a jest-book, bought at the stall, at the outset of his professional career.

I think it was subsequently to the performance

of Herr Mooney, the spangled contortionist, who achieved such fame through his desperate efforts to swallow himself, that the celebrated trick act of the Young Strangler, from the Imperial Circus, Samarcand, took place. Strangler used to appear, you recollect, as a British sailor, from which, by continual flinging off his outer garments into the ring, he was successively transformed into a parish beadle, Punch, a Scottish Highlander, Massaroni the Brigand, the Emperor Napoleon, and Cupid, God of Love. It was just after Strangler's second recal, amid thunders of applause at the close of his performance, that the band, which had been contentedly repeating, times and again, those good old jog-trot airs traditional in all circuses I have ever seen all over the world, and which seem to have been expressly composed for horses to canter to, addressed itself to a very slow and almost lugubrious prelude. And then the heavy curtains which veiled the entrance to the circus from the stables were drawn aside, the barriers were thrown open, and Madame Ernestine, in a black velvet riding-habit, a shining beaver, a silver grey veil, and waving an ivory-mounted whip, made her appearance on her celebrated trained steed—a magnificent chesnut mare.


The high school of horsemanship required some time to be appreciated. In the beginning, it bored you somewhat. A long time elapsed before it

seemed to be coming to anything. At first the movements of the trained steed induced the belief that she had got a stone in her foot, and was making stately but tedious efforts, always to slow music, to paw the impediment out. Then she slowly backed on to the edges of the ring, among the groundlings, causing the women and children in the lower rows to shriek. After that she reared up, until her fore-hoofs seemed in dangerous proximity to the chandelier, and her long sweeping tail lay almost on a level with the dust of the arena. Then she curvetted sideways; then she went through a series of dignified steps, now approaching a gavotte, and now offering some resemblance to the menuet de la cour. Anon the musicians struck up a livelier strain, and the trained steed began to prance and to canter. The canter broke into a gallop, interspersed with sudden checks, with rigid halts, with renewed gallops, with desperate plunges, and which concluded with a terrific highflying leap over the barriers. The audience shouted applause. The grooms clambered on to the barriers, and held up between them a scarf breast high. The trained steed took it easily, and bounded back into the ring. And then the music became soft and solemn and subdued again, and the docile creature subsided into gentle amblings, and almost imperceptible gambadoes. Such was the high school of horsemanship. It has been re-

fined since then, and the leap over the scarf left out; but it still culminates in a sensation.

Sir William Long cared very little for the high school of horsemanship; but he never took his eyes off the horsewoman. She rode wonderfully well. She was evidently very powerful of hand, and had complete command (the which she exercised unsparingly) over her horse; but her movements were at the same time replete with grace. She flinched not, she faltered not when her charger was caracoling on a bias perilously out of the centre of gravity. She and the horse seemed one. She must have been Lycus's sister.


She was, more certainly, the Countess who once used to live at the Hôtel Rataplan; the once-handsome lady who had dined at Greenwich, and taken Lily to be fitted out at Cutwig and Co.'s, and had left the child at the Marcassin's. She was the widow of Francis Blunt. "Yes," Sir William said to himself, "it was she." Wofully changed in many respects she was; by age, perchance, the least; but there were the old traits; there was the old manner; and, at the heat and height of her horse-tricks, when the animal she rode was careering round the circle at topmost speed, there were audible above the sibilant slash of the whip on the poor beast's flank, the cries by which she strove to excite him to still further rapidity. And these were the same tones which Sir William Long had



heard, years ago, when the impetuous woman was angry or excited.

She had more than reached middle age, and her features, it was easy to see, had lost their beauty. Beneath the paint and powder, they must have been swollen or haggard, flushed or sallow. You could not tell, in the glare of the gaslight, the precise nature of the change which had come over her, or how she would look by day; but something told you that the change was an awful one. Masses of superb hair there still were, braided beneath her hat; but, psha! is not superb hair to be bought at the barber's for so much an ounce? But her eyes still flashed, and her teeth were still white, and her figure was still supple and stately.

Sir William Long waited until the high-school act had come to a close; and then gently woke up Lord Carlton. His lordship was good enough to say that he had spent a most delightful evening; but that he was afraid that the claret was corked. He also inquired after Thomas Tuttleshell, and being informed that the excellent creature in question was below, in the gardens, remarked that he dare say Tom was looking up some supper. Which was the precise truth. Thomas had fastened on a special waiter, one whose civility was only equalled by his sobriety—a combination of qualities somewhat rare at Ranelagh, and at other places of entertainment besides—and had instructed him to



lay out a neat little repast in one of the arbours overlooking the covered promenade: something toothsome in the way of cold chickens, lobster-salad, champagne, and that rack punch, for the concoction of which Ranelagh had earned so world-wide and well-deserved a fame. The quantities of rack punch drunk at Ranelagh by his late Royal Highness the Prince Regent, assisted by Philip Duke of Orleans and Colonel Hanger! The statistician staggers at the task of enumeration.

The Sultan was by this time weary of the horse-riding, and strolled down with his lordship, lisping flippant disparagement of the "dreadful painted old woman" who had presumed to inflict her forty years upon him. If the Countess could only have heard that complacent Sultan's criticism! There was life, and muscle, and devil in her still; and I believe that the protégée of La Beugleuse would have essayed to tear the dandy limb from limb.

Sir William Long was glad to slip away from companions with whom he had scant sympathy. The sleepy peer bored him; and Greyfaunt's arrogance and petit-maitre assumptions irritated him beyond measure: he could scarcely tell why. "I am growing crabbed and morose," Sir William reasoned; "my liver must be out of order. I was wont to be tolerant of puppies. This young fellow is not an arranter donkey than hundreds of his race who hang about town; yet his drawling in-

solence makes me quiver all over with a desire to knock him down. Decidedly we are as oil and vinegar, Monsieur Greyfaunt and I." He called him "Monsieur," the further to disparage him in the eyes of himself—the baronet of unmingled English lineage.

Fortuitously he met Tom Tuttleshell returning beaming from his interview with the special waiter. He liked Tom, and, although using him, as most men did that obliging soul, did not despise him.

"Tom," said the baronet, "you are just the fellow to do me a service."

"What is it, Sir William?" asked Tom, who would have tried to jump through one of the hoops, or to attempt the high school of horsemanship itself, if any one had asked him affably.

"I want to go behind the scenes of the circus."

Tom rubbed his left whisker with a puzzled air. "I have heard of scenes *in* the circus," he rejoined; "but there are no scenes behind it, that I am aware of. There's not much to see in the place where the horse-riders go between the performances, if that's what you mean. Stables and sawdust, and grooms, and lots of people cursing and swearing dreadfully. Those horse-riders are a rough lot. Very dull and very dirty, and so on."

"Never mind what kind of a place it is. I wish to see it. Will you pass me through? or shall I ask Mr. M'Variety?"

“No need to do that, Sir William. I’ll get you in, of course. I have the Open, sesame ! all over the gardens.”

Tom seemed to have the Open, sesame ! everywhere. They used to say he had a master-key to the bullion vaults of the Bank of England, the tea-room at Almack’s, the omnibus-box at Her Majesty’s, the copper door in the wall of Northumberland House, and the cage where the crown is kept in the Tower of London.

He led the baronet to a little door of unpainted wood, on which were rudely red-ochred the words —“No admittance except on business.” Sir William told him where to find Lord Carlton, and Tom, after sundry cabalistic signs and occult whispers which made it “all right” with the door-keeper (who looked half like a groom, and half like a gravedigger, and was, in truth, by day, a kind of under-gardener and odd man, who looked about the parterres and bosquets of Ranelagh), went on his way, rejoicing.

This was not the first theatre, or semi-theatre, by many scores, to the penetralia of which Sir William Long had in his time gained admittance. From the Italian Opera House to the little dramatic hovels of country towns, “Behind the Scenes” was a familiar locality to him. From experience, he knew that the best course to pursue in these strange places was to keep straight on, until somebody halloed to him to stop.

He heard the loud, angry tones of a woman's voice; and he knew at once whose voice it was.

He was in a kind of alley, or sawdusted gang-way, smelling very strongly of gas, orange-peel, and horse-litter, leading on one hand to the stables, and on the other to a range of closets rudely partitioned off with planks and used as dressing-rooms by the ladies and gentlemen of the equestrian company. He was bidden to "get out of the way there" by a groom, who was leading a very stout and peaceful Dobbin, with a mild, watery eye, a very round nose, and a coat covered all over with spots, like black wafers. This was the celebrated educated pony *Rasselas*, that played at chess (invariably checkmating the clown), drank port wine, and made believe to read the Supplement of the *Times* newspaper.

Stepping aside to avoid this erudite animal, Sir William found himself close to one of the dressing-rooms just mentioned, and the door of which was more than half open. A lady in a riding-habit, the trail of the skirt thrown over her arm, was standing on the threshold, her back towards him, and raging fearfully.

Her conversation and her ire were apparently levelled at some person inside the dressing-room.

"You nasty, lazy, idle, worthless little wretch," she cried out, "you've sewn the lining in my hat so badly that it all but tumbled off and ruined my act.

Look at it—look at it, you slovenly little cat. Look at it, you good-for-nothing, do-nothing pauper!”

With which agreeable and considerate remarks she absolutely wrenched the unsatisfactory beaver from off her head, and flung it from her into the dressing-room towards the unseen object of her rage.

Sir William heard a plaintive little sob from the dressing-room.

The infuriated woman suddenly turned her tongue over, and in a voluble scream proceeded to abuse the invisible offender in French.

“Oui, pleure. Ça fera du bien, n'est-ce pas? Ça raccommode un chapeau de trente-cinq francs que v'là abîmé. Ah! tu me paieras ce chapeau-là, petite diablesse! Pleure donc. Toi et un crocodile c'est à pleurnicher à qui mieux mieux. Petite satanée, tu me sers encore un plat de ton métier. Ne me donne pas la réplique, ou je te flanque une paire de gifles. Tu l'as fait exprès. Exprès. M'entends-tu? Et ces palefreniers—qui sont bien les plus infâmes drôles du monde—sont là qui ricament. Attends, attends! je vais te tremper une soupe, fainéante! Ma parole d'honneur, j'ai envie de te cingler les épaules avec ma cravache.”

She made so threatening a move inwards, she made so ominous a gesture with the hand that held the horsewhip, that Sir William, who, although he could ill keep pace with, had understood the pur-

port of her jargon well enough, became really alarmed lest positive outrage should follow her menace. He stepped forward, and, at all hazards determined to arrest her in her intent, laid his hand on her arm, and stammered out, "Madame! madame! je vous en prie!"

The woman turned round upon him with ferocious rapidity. In forcing her hat off, her hair had come down. Those tresses were not from the barber's at so much an ounce. They were her own, and were superb. But, with her locks streaming over her shoulders, and her bloodshot eyes, and the heat-drops pouring down her face, which Sir William could see now was coarse and furrowed, she looked like a fury.

"Cent mille tonnerres!" she cried out, "que me veut ce voyou-là?"

The situation was critical—Madame Ernestine was a lady evidently accustomed to the adoption of extreme measures. What business had Sir William there, then? What right had he to interfere with a lady with whom he was unacquainted, and who was merely scolding—her servant, perhaps? A horsewhip might not have been an unusual argument in use behind the scenes of a circus. Now that he had gone so far, what was to be his next move?

Luckily, Madame Ernestine evinced no immediate intent of seizing him by the throat, or of

tearing his eyes out. As even greater luck would have it, M'Variety, the manager, came bustling up at this moment.

"What's the matter—what's the matter?" he inquired of an assistant riding-master.

"It's that thundering Frenchwoman again," replied the gentleman with the gold braid down the seams of his pantaloons, and the moustache whose lustrous blackness was due to the soot from the smoke of a candle, caught on the lid of a pomatum-pot, rubbed up with the unguent and applied with the finger, hot. "'Pon my word, governor, there'll be murder here some night—she'll knife somebody, and get hanged at Horsemonger-lane. The way she bullies that poor little girl who waits upon her's awful. This is the third time to-night I've heard her threaten to skin her alive."

"Oh, nonsense," rejoined Mr. M'Variety, who remembered how well the Madame drew, and wished to keep things as pleasant as possible. "It's only her temper." And he pushed his way by towards the scene of action.

"Temper be smothered," grumbled the assistant riding-master, retiring into a corner, and giving his whip a vengeful crack. "She's a regular devil that woman, and four nights out of six she's as lushy as a boiled owl. If she belonged to me I wouldn't quilt her! I wouldn't make the figure of

eight on her shoulders with whipcord. Oh dear no ! not at all."

"Mr. M'Variety," said the baronet, as the manager came bustling up, "you will infinitely oblige me by introducing me to the talented equestrian, Madame Ernestine, whose charming performance I have just witnessed, and whose acquaintance I am respectfully anxious to make."


Madame Ernestine appeared to be susceptible of conciliation. She curtseyed with her old haughty grace as the delighted manager ceremoniously presented Sir William Long, Baronet, to her; she even bestowed a smile upon him; but she took care to close the door of her dressing-room behind her, and to set her back against it, and, meanwhile, from the countenance of Sir William Long, Baronet, she never moved her eyes.

The manager, who was always in a hurry, bustled away again, and left them together.

"Ah! it is you," the woman said. "I have written to you half a dozen times for money, and you have never answered me. That was long ago, it is true."

Sir William explained that he had been abroad, sometimes for years at a time. Where had she written to?

"It does not matter. You did not send the money. You are all alike, you men. What do you want now?"



"Well, we are old friends, Countess, and——"

"Bah! A d'autres vos sornettes. What do you want with me now that I am old, and wrinkled, and fond of brandy, and cannot show my legs. You don't want me to dine at Greenwich with you now. I am ugly and coarse, and éreintée."

"Come, come, Countess," pursued Sir William, "don't be cross. Whitebait isn't in, or we should be delighted to see you at Greenwich, I'm sure. You must come and sup with us to-night when you have changed your dress. Carlton is here. You remember Carlton?"

"I remember everybody. How old and worn you look. What have you been doing to yourself? You must have to pay dearly for your bonnes fortunes now. Nobody would fall in love with you pour vos beaux yeux."

She was unchanged, inwardly at least. The old, insolent, defiant Countess.

"Never mind what I have been doing to myself. Will you come and sup? We will have plenty of champagne."

"Champagne! I am too old to drink champagne. I like cognac better. Well, never mind. We will have a night of it, as we used to have in the old time:

Eh gai, gai, gai,
La gaudriole!"

she sang, in an old cracked voice.

William Long could scarcely refrain from a shudder; but he continued diplomatic to the last. "How long shall you be changing your dress?" he asked.

"Half an hour. I must wash this paint off and put some more on. Il faut que je me fasse belle ce soir pour vous, mes beaux seigneurs. Wait until the fireworks are over, and then come for me to this door. Who else will be of the party besides Milord Carlton?"

She rolled his name and title under her tongue, as though it were a sweet morsel, and had a delicious flavour to her. I dare say it had. She had been brought very low in the world. It was long—a weary, dreary long time—since she had consorted with lords. Now she felt herself again. She would so paint and bedizen herself, she thought, as to make it impossible for them to discover that she was no longer young.

"Tom Tuttleshell will be of us. You know Tom?"

"Do I know my grandmother? Histoire de l'Arche de Noé. Monsieur Tuttleshell and I are friends—business friends—of some standing. C'est un franc niais, mais il m'a été utile. Who else?"

"Mr. Edgar Greyfaunt."

"Connais pas. What a droll of a name."

"He is to all intents and purposes an Englishman; but his grand-aunt, a Madame de Kergolay,

who brought him up, was a Frenchwoman, and died lately in Paris. Monsieur, or Mr. Edgar Greyfaunt, has inherited the whole of her fortune."

"A-a-a-h!" the Countess exclaimed, drawing a prolonged breath. "It seems to me that I have heard some stories about this Madame de Kergolay before. An old hypocrite who stole children away from their parents, quoi? I should very much like to see this Monsieur Edgar Greyfaunt. Now go away, and I will get ready."

"Is there any one else you would like to bring with you to supper? Comrade, sister, any one?"

"I have no sisters, as you know, or ought to know by this time. Comrades, forsooth! Are you in the habit of associating with stable-boys? What men are here I hate, what women I despise. You have asked my director, I suppose? He is as avaricious as a Jew, and has robbed me shamefully; but otherwise he is bon enfant, and amuses me."

"We will take care to secure Mr. M'Variety. But consider well. Is there no one else. Whose voice was that I heard in your dressing-room? Had you not a child—a daughter—years ago? She must be grown up by this time."

The Countess made him an ironical curtsey. "Merci du compliment, monseigneur," she sneered. "Yes, I know well enough that I am growing old."

Du reste, let me inform you that I am not in the habit of bringing my *fille de chambre*—she laid, perhaps intentionally, a stronger emphasis on the word “*fille*” than on those which followed—“and that if you will be good enough to take care of your own affairs, I shall have much pleasure in attending to mine. I come alone or not at all. Am I understood?”

“Perfectly. Brava! you are quite the old Countess—I beg pardon, the young Countess—we used to know and call Semiramis. Come alone, if such is your will. Now, good-by until after the fireworks.”

He was retiring, when she recalled him.

“Stop, *mauvais sujet*,” she cried; “have you got a *billet de cent francs* about you *par hasard*? I want to buy some gloves.”

Sir William laughed. “You will scarcely find the Burlington Arcade at South Lambeth,” he said, as searching in his waistcoat-pocket he brought out some loose sovereigns and dropped them into the woman’s outstretched hand. She just nodded her thanks, and going into her room shut the door.

The performances in the circus were over, and the workpeople were turning off the gas. The baronet had some difficulty in groping his way to the door.

“She has not changed a bit, save in looks,” he


soliloquised; "what a devouring harpy it is, to be sure! If ever the horse-leech had a fourth daughter, the Countess must have been the one. How hungry she used to be in the old days after money."

Madame Ernestine, on her part, was also soliloquising. "Ah! I am Semiramis, am I? Ah! I am asked to supper because it is thought I have a daughter. Ah! pieces of gold are flung to me with a taunt, like pennies to a beggar. Little devil"—she said this savagely, and not to herself. "Thou art sticking pins into me on purpose. Quick, my pink dress; quick, or I shall strangle thee!"

CHAPTER VI.

LILY'S NEW LIFE.

A BREATH of her old life had blown on the faded cheek of the horse-riding Countess. The boon companions of bygone times, the opportunity for being luxurious, and haughty, and insolent, had returned once more. She painted and decked herself with a will; for she knew how select was her audience, and how sure she was of their plaudits. To think that she—who had been the leader of that kind of fashion which fashionable young men are ashamed to own, yet follow, and bow down before with servile reverence—should have been but an hour ago doomed to caper on a circus-horse for the amusement of an amphitheatre full of plebeians, admitted for sixpence in addition to the ordinary price of entrance to the gardens! To think



that not so very long since, her worldly estate should have been even more debased, and that, ruddled and tattooed, and with feathers on her head, she should have been shown, as a mock savage, for a few liards, on the boards of a French booth!

So the Countess is gone to her supper, and the horses are safe in their stables. The last Roman candle has smouldered out, and very ghastly and gallows-like in the moonlight looks the iron framework of the fireworks. A faint odour of burning yet lingers about them, and the night breeze stirs shreds of cartridge-paper, half consumed to cinder, which have fallen in the thickets of Ranelagh. You might fancy that this was some huge Place de Grève, where criminals had been broken on the Catherine-wheel, or hanged upon gibbets, and their bodies afterwards given up to the flames. But it was only the corpse of Pleasure that had thus been burnt to ashes.

The Countess is gone to her supper, the peep-shows and fiddling-tents are shut up, and Ranelagh is left to darkness, to the night watchman, and to Lily Floris.

Lily did not live in the gardens, but she and her—well, her guardian, her protectress, her mistress, her tyrant, were generally the last to leave the place. The Countess was generally so much exhausted by her exertions in the high school of horsemanship, as to require a long period of rest

in her dressing-room before she went home. Stimulants—stimulants stronger than eau-de-Cologne—had to be administered before she felt strong enough to retire to her domicile. The Countess was liberal—not to say lavish—in her use of stimulants. As she had attained middle age, as her husband was dead, and she had no particular character to speak of, it may not be indiscreet to avow, once for all, that she was in the habit of taking a great deal too much brandy-and-water. She said it did her good. The doctor said it did her harm; but, at any rate, she took it: cold. It did not improve her temper. Far from angelic at the best of times, it now bordered very closely on the fiendish. Her powers of tongue were by no means diminished; yet she seemed to distrust them, and her abusive eloquence was, by no means rarely, backed up by blows. She was frequently provoked into striking those who offended her; and who could avoid giving offence to that terrible Countess? I have heard that the children of the man who makes birch-brooms have usually a bad time of it; and there is considerable risk in residing with a lady of violent temper addicted to drinking, of equestrian pursuits, and part of whose necessary equipment is a riding-whip.

Lily often thought of that dreadful night in Paris, when the Italian met her in the Elysian Fields. Was it a judgment on her, for running

away, she wondered, that her temporary evasion had been followed by so dire a bondage? Perhaps. Her terror had been so excessive, her despair so great, that it was only in a dim and fragmentary manner that she could recal the incidents of her capture. She had fainted somewhere, that she knew. On returning to consciousness, she had found herself in a filthy little room, stretched on a filthier mattress laid upon the floor. The Italian was crouched on a stool by the fireplace, smoking, and a toothless ragged old woman was pottering over some evil-smelling mess in a pipkin on the hearth. The room was seemingly Signor Ventimillioni's studio; for, strewn about, were numbers of unfinished wax torsos, some with wigs and some without, some horrid in hirsute adornments in the way of whiskers and moustaches, and some bare and grinning like corpses. Arms, legs, hands and feet, appertaining to celebrated characters in ancient and modern history, littered a row of shelves and a rough deal table, together with certain pots full of colour, and bits of lace and tinsel. A faint odour of warm wax, even more sickening than that of the stew in the old woman's pipkin, pervaded the hovel.

There came from an inner room a woman with her hair hanging over her shoulders, a half-washed face, for fantastic streaks of paint were still visible on her cheeks and forehead, and an old petticoat

and shawl hastily thrown over a theatrical tunic and fleshings. Her spangled sandals were plainly visible beneath her dress. She held in one hand a flaring tallow candle, and in the other a glass of some liquor.

She knelt down by the side of the still half-fainting girl, and held the glass to her lips.

"Drink!" she said, in English, "drink! this instant. It will do you good. Drink! or I'll strangle you."

Lily could not but obey. The strangely accoutred woman looked so fierce, and spoke so sternly. She swallowed a mouthful of the liquid, which was nauseous to her palate and scorching to her throat, and was, indeed, brandy mingled with water. After a short time she felt better, though dizzy.

"And so I have found you at last, little runaway," the woman went on. "I could have sworn it was you in the booth. I knew those hypocritical little eyes of yours at once. Ah! I have had a fine chase after you, cunning little fox as you are. Where have you been all these years, you crocodile? Come, confess. Let me know all about it. Speak, or I'll beat you."

Nervous and shattered as she was, Lily could at first give scarcely a coherent reply to the questions with which the strange woman well-nigh overwhelmed her. Though she had a vague and alarmed

dread of whom she might be, she was not prepared at first to admit her right to interrogate her. In fact, she could only tremble and palpitate like a little bird fresh caught in the hand of a strong cruel boy.

The woman made her drink more of the liquid. Lily pleaded that it nearly choked her, and burnt her, but she would take no denial. Although it seemed to set her brain on fire, she really felt stronger for it, and, after a time, could talk. The woman led her on, not unadroitly, by asking her if she remembered Miss Bunnycastle's school at Stockwell, the dinner at Greenwich, the steam-boat, the journey to Paris, the Pension Marcassin. Yes: Lily remembered all these. What next? the woman asked threateningly. Well, she told all she knew of her residence with Madame de Kergolay: all save her love for Edgar Greyfaunt.

Why had she left the roof of the lady who had been so kind to her? Lily experienced much difficulty in explaining that part of the matter. She could not lie; and yet she dared not avow the hard and bitter truth. The woman would not believe that she had found herself in the Champs Elysées by accident. She had run away, she said: of that she was certain. Lily, blushing and sobbing, was constrained to admit her flight. Why had she fled? the woman asked her again and again, in tones which each time became more menacing.


She raised her clenched hand at last, and might have brought it down heavily (for she had been partaking freely of the stimulant which she had forced Lily to sip); but the Italian muttered something from his stool, and she desisted. The girl sought to pacify her. She tried to explain. She confessed that she had been ungrateful to her benefactress, that she had lost her affection, and that she saw nothing before her but sudden flight.

"Ungrateful! I can well believe that. To whom hast thou not been ungrateful, little spawn of evil? From youth upwards it has always been the same story—ingratitude, ingratitude!"

Surely she, the Wild Woman, had done a great deal in her time to earn the poor child's gratitude!

"There is some man at the bottom of this," she said at last, rising as if wearied with further cross-questioning. "Thou art just the age to make a fool of thyself for a dandy face and a pair of blonde whiskers. Never mind, little one; we will wait. Sooner or later, by fair means or by foul, we will have thy secret out of thee."

She let her be at last, and the girl sank into a long deep slumber. Waking towards morning, Lily turned on her sorry pallet, and, half hoping that she might never wake again, once more sank into sleep. Excitement, fatigue, and the



liquor they had made her swallow, had been more than opiates to her.

She was kept close prisoner in the hovel the whole of that day and the whole of the next. The fêtes still continued, and her tyrant was called upon to enact, during at least sixteen hours out of the twenty-four, the part she was so admirably qualified to fill: that of the Wild Woman. Lily used to look upon her in the morning with a curiosity that was mingled with horror as she arrayed herself for the mountebankery of the day. It was a monstrous toilette. How soiled and faded the fleshings were! How frayed at the wrists and armpits! How they bulged into ugly creases at the knees and elbows! How splay-footed the sandals looked, how coarse and garish the embroidery! She had no time to pink her fleshings, but rubbed powdered vermilion into the parts that were discoloured, just as she rubbed it into her face. There were patches of the latter, however, that required orpiment, and cerese, and bismuth, and ochre, and chrome yellow to be laid on in grotesque streaks, and half-moons, and dabs. Was she not a Wild Woman of the Prairies? Before she daubed on her war-paint she would anoint her face and hands with a tallow candle.

"No cold cream for me now, little angel," she would say, with a horrible leer, to the wondering girl. "Watch well what I am doing. It will

soon be thy turn to assist me to dress, and woe betide thee if thou makest blunders. Observe, the candle first; the tallow, *c'est du suif, de chez l'épiciier, tout de bon.* And I, who have covered myself with pearl powder—*de vraies perles d'Orient*—who have basked in *eau-de-Cologne* and milk of almonds, and who have found, when I have done dressing, the bouquet left for me at the door of my loge by the duke or the ambassador—ay, the bouquet with a diamond ring for a holder. '*Cré nom! c'est à crever de rage!*'"

Then she would drink a little brandy, and a little more, and more, and console herself, and begin to sing.

When she was fully accoutred in all her paint, and all her feathers, and spangles, and tawdry, twopenny splendours, she would, after surveying herself in a broken piece of looking-glass, come forward to Lily and pose and grimace before her with the great wooden club and foil paper-covered hatchet that went to make up her paraphernalia.

"Am I handsome, *à cette heure?* Am I graceful? Am I fascinating? Am I *La Bella Zigazesi*, who has turned so many hearts?" she would cry, ironically.

Lily did not know what answer to return.

"You say nothing. You despise your m—— your protectress. Ah! you disdain me, do you, *Mademoiselle la Comtesse—Baronne—Princesse de Kergolay—Mademoiselle la Marquise de Ca-*

rabas—Quatre sous? We will soon take your pride out of you. Quick, trollop. Donne-moi la goutte. Give me some brandy, do you hear?"

Lily poured out for her, into a glass that was without a foot, some of the poison the woman liked so well.

"Ah! that is good," she would say, drawing a long breath. "Ça tue à la longue, mais ça donne du courage—du zug-zug." And then she would throw back her long hair, now coarse and ropy from inculture, and flecked with grey. "A short life and a merry one. Vive la joie et le zug-zug! Dire que j'ai été une miladi—la femme d'un gentilhomme. C'était de la crapule, ce Blunt. Un franc coquin que j'ai eu pour mari. Yes, he was a scoundrel, but he was a gentleman, and I was his wife. I used to ride in a carriage and go to the opera with ostrich feathers in my head. I used to wear diamonds. Look at my hands now, you wolf cub."

Rude work had spread the muscles, swollen the knuckles, roughened the skin, and covered the backs with gnarled knots, like unto the roots of trees. They had once been handsome hands; but they were discoloured now, and chapped and barked by exposure. In bitter mockery of her former state, she still had her fingers covered with rings; but they were paltry baubles, not worth ten sous apiece—mere bits of glass backed with tinsel

and set in hoops of brass, which left green stains upon her flesh.

She would come home at night, tired, dusty, perspiring, the ruddle on her face muddled into one cloudy morass, and more than half intoxicated. The Italian waxwork man would come with her, and he who wore the suit of armour. There was another Italian too, a hideous hunchbacked fellow with a heavy fringe of black whisker beneath his chin, and a huge fur cap and velveteen jacket, who dealt in white mice, marmots, hurdy-gurdies, and Savoyard boys. He went by the name of "L'organo di Barbaria," and no other. He brought one of his slaves with him the second day, a wobegone little object from Chambéry, aged about eleven, very wan-faced and ragged, who had a consumptive cough, and crouched down in a corner, cuddling a diminutive monkey, who was, as to his upper parts, attired after the fashion of a marquis of the ancient régime, and, as to his lower, after that of the Sultana Scheherazade, as seen in illustrations of the Arabian Nights. And of this monkey the wobegone little boy from Chambéry seemed passionately fond.

While the men and the Wild Woman were wrangling over their brandy and tobacco and dominoes, Lily ventured to approach the little monkey boy, and slip into his hand a piece of bread, the remnant of her coarse repast.

The Wild Woman saw the action. "Young robber," she cried out. "Attends, je vais te donner une triplée. Ah! I have the double six." But beyond this she took no notice of Lily's patronage of the Savoyard.

The girl was very glad. She made the boy eat, and was delighted that he first of all took care of the monkey, whom he addressed as Cupidon, and whose white teeth were soon chattering over a crisp bit of crust. Lily, growing bolder, stroked the long lean paw of the ape, and even mustered up enough courage to scratch his bullet head. He resented this liberty somewhat, and might have bitten the girl, but for a warning tug at his chain on the part of his master. Then he retired into private life, and the bosom of the Savoyard's friendly but uncleanly shirt, there to dwell in pensive dreams, perhaps, of his primitive forests, and the happy days when he hung on the limbs of trees by his prehensile tail, watching his great-uncle as he hurled cocoa-nuts at the head of the intrusive traveller. Still absorbed as he was in the pleasures of warmth and rest from labour, Lily could see his little bright eyes twinklingly watching her from under the waistcoat of the Alpine boy.

"Where do you dance?" asked the Savoyard.

"Dance?" quoth Lily, opening her eyes.

"Haven't I seen you with a tambourine and red shoes, doing the Infiorata?"

Lily told him, gently, that it must be some other girl.

“How much did your padrona give for you? My padrone paid six hundred francs for Vittore Emmanuele.” (The names of all Savoyards are either Victor Emmanuel, Charles Albert, or Charles John). “My father bought two cows and six goats with my price, and paid off Grippe Minaud the bloodsucker, who had lent him money to raise his crop. Does your padrona beat you? My master beats us with a chain. Luigi, the boy from Genoa, who died, tried to poison ‘L’organo’ in his petit verre. When they washed him for burial his body was all blue.”

They were a curious trio, the girl, the Savoyard, and the ape.

On the morning of the third day the Wild Woman came to Lily’s bedside, and said, “March!” The girl had nothing to pack up, and still wore the modest little bonnet and shawl she had had on when she ran away from Madame de Kergolay. The Wild Woman had discovered her locket, and, not without tears and entreaties on Lily’s part, had wrenched it away from her. She had nothing now that belonged to her in the world, and was Quite Alone.

The Wild Woman’s travelling dress was a faded tartan gown, and a more faded scarlet shawl, with a bonnet inconceivably battered. She did not fail

to remark, however, as she bade Lily survey her, that she had been in the habit of wearing velvets and cashmeres, and a bird of paradise plume in her bonnet. And then she cursed, and took a little more cognac.

The Italian waxwork man, who was either the Wild Woman's husband, or some relative, near, but decidedly not dear to her, was to be of the party. He was not so very ill-conditioned a fellow, and was passing kind to Lily, never failing to remonstrate, and, if need were, to interfere if the woman offered to strike her. The Wild Woman's temper, especially towards evening, when she had partaken most copiously of cognac, was very uncertain; and there was no knowing when the blows might begin to fall.

They went by means of a waggon, laden with the waxwork and the scenery and appointments of the Wild Woman (for the shows were a joint concern, and Ventimillioni appeared to be proprietor of them both), to a place called Pontoise. Thence to Orleans, and thence even so far as Dijon. They halted by night at mean inns, where sometimes they obtained a couple of bedrooms cheaply, and sometimes Ventimillioni and the Countess—that is to say, the Wild Woman—camped out in a barn. The toothless old woman had been left in charge of the hovel on the quay in Paris, but Lily had always, however small and

miserable it might be, a room to herself. The Wild Woman never failed, likewise, in the precaution of taking away Lily's clothes, and the candle, and locking the door after her, when she retired for the night.

The girl fell into a state of semi-lassitude and apathy. She did not seem to care much what became of her. She had lost her purview. Her horizon was bounded on all sides by the Wild Woman and the Italian, and beyond them she could discern nothing. She was not specially desirous to die; but she was not particularly anxious about living. She was not even actively unhappy. She was quite submissive and resigned: only numbed, and chilled, and torpid.

There were fairs on the road; and at some of these the Wild Woman gave her performance, and Signor Ventimillioni exhibited his waxwork. On these occasions Lily was always carefully locked in her room, and got neither dinner nor supper till the pair returned at night, the woman not very sober, now grumbling, now chuckling over the receipts of the day and evening.

It was at a place called St. Esprit, and when Lily had been locked up many hours on a hot August afternoon, and felt very lonely—just that kind of loneliness when you begin to hear strange noises that have no foundation save in your imagination—that a big country girl, who was waitress

and chambermaid at the miserable auberge the party had put up at, came into the room. "I have got another key, little one," she said, triumphantly.

The country girl had very red elbows and a face like a tomato, little pig's eyes, and matted hair whose roots were within an inch and a half of her eyebrows. She breathed hard when she spoke, and, seemingly, was not unaccustomed to the use of garlic as a condiment with her meals.

"I have a key, little one," she continued, "and something else, too. *Attrape*." And from beneath her apron she produced a mighty slice of bread covered with blackberry jam.

Lily was really hungry, and only too glad to get the bread and jam. She had well-nigh devoured it, when the girl whose face was like a tomato said:

"Why don't you run away? I would, if I were you. I know those wretches treat you cruelly. I have heard them abusing you at night, after I have gone to bed. *Tenez, ma petite*. I have got fifteen francs saved up to buy me a golden cross, but my *bien-aimé* will give me another, I am sure, even if he is obliged to sell himself as a substitute in the conscription to do so. Take my fifteen francs, and run away from these bad people."

Run away! She had tried that once before; but whither was Lily to run now?

CHAPTER VII.

RANELAGH WITH THE LIGHTS OUT.

LILY heard the good-natured country girl out, and thanked her for her bread and jam, but she bade her take back the key, lest she should get herself into trouble, and told her that she had no thoughts of running away. No one meant to treat her unkindly, she said, and, if she was unhappy, it was her own fault. She was, in truth, too weary to fly. She did not care much what became of her. The first hour of captivity is very awful; you rage and scream, and feel as though you could hang yourself to your dungeon bars, or dash your brains out against the walls; but days, weeks, months, years pass, and at last you bear your durance with a dull apathy that is well-nigh utter indifference. It does not so much matter. A year the more or

a year the less does not count. And at last, when haply the cell door is opened, and you are told that you are free, you are in no very great hurry to move. You have remained here so long, why should you not stay here a little longer? Prisoners have been known to memorialise their jailer to be allowed to stop, when their discharge has arrived, and at last they have had to be turned out of the prison by force. There are times when you might leave Gonfaloniere's door in the casemates of Spielberg open, and tell him that the sentinel is bought, and that he has two hours to get away—when Silvio Pellico might find the bars of his cell window under the piombi sawn through, and a rope-ladder nailed to the sill; and yet when the captives would but yawn, and think it scarcely worth their while to make their escape. There is somewhat of the infinite mercy of Heaven in thus blunting our senses during suffering. The victim sleeps at the stake. I have heard of a convict who committed suicide because the end of his slavery was rapidly approaching; but I think you might trust a hundred convicts with razors to shave themselves every day for a year without three of them cutting their throats.

Lily was not in chains, and her window was not barred; but she was a captive, nevertheless. She had resigned herself to it, and waited, submissively enough, for what was to come next.

The hostess of the tavern where they lived at Dijon brought her her meals after this. Perhaps she suspected the good nature of her servant girl. The Wild Woman had told her that Lily was a refractory apprentice, obstinately intent on not learning to dance on the tight-rope, and inveterately addicted to running away. The hostess, who had had much to do with mountebanks in her time (her husband had been a paillasse, and her eldest son was a ventriloquist, while her youngest daughter walked on stilts), fully believed this story, and looked upon Lily as a very atrocious young criminal indeed.

"It you were apprenticed to me," she would say, "my faith, I would arrange you. You should learn to dance as the bears do. *Va petite drôlesse, je te ferais sauter à la musique d'un bon martinet.* I'd lay a strap about you, that's all."

Lily did not think it worth while to bandy words with this woman, who was stupid and violent, and given to imbibing too much cassis.

"Sulky young baboon," the hostess would continue, shaking her forefinger at her. "At thy age, too. Almost a woman. And not so very bad-looking, either," she added, in an under tone, to herself. "Dost thou know what will come to thee for running away? The police will get hold of thee, and thou wilt be sent to prison, absolument comme une coureuse. Is it so very difficult, then, to dance on the cord? Bah! when I was half thy

age, my father made me swallow a Turkish scimitar, and the sabre of a cuirassier; and before I was twelve, I was practising the back summersault on a spring board into a pond of water, to prevent breaking my bones when I fell."

A fortnight elapsed before the Wild Woman came back; but she returned radiant. They had been to Lyons: to the fair of the Croix Rouge. Ventimillioni had run over to Geneva, where, in those days, and may be, for aught I know, to this day, there is a public gaming-table. Luck was in his favour, and the Italian had won heavily: two hundred Napoleons. He had come back to Lyons, dressed up the Wild Woman in satin and velvet, bought her a bonnet with a bird of paradise plume in it, covered her wrist and neck with cheap jewellery, and taken her over to Geneva. Luck had gone against him then; and with a very few Napoleons remaining from his winnings, he was prepared moodily to return to the place whence he came, and take to the waxwork business again. But the Wild Woman—Madame la Comtesse, in future, if you please—had been experiencing the smiles of fortune, while on the unhappy Ventimillioni she had so suddenly scowled. Madame had not ventured anything beyond a few five-franc pieces on the red or the black; but she had met an old, a very old acquaintance at Geneva. Whence it arose that she returned to Dijon radiant.

"Up, paresseuse!" she cried to Lily. "Up,

and get your rags together. We are going back to England and to life."

The girl, who passed most of her time now crouching listlessly in a corner, interpreted this command as a literal one, and stood up in obedience to it. Madame seemed to recollect that the rags she had spoken of were already gotten together, and that Lily had no others.

"Did ever one see such a tatterdemalion?" she grumbled. "I must go to a *revendeuse à la toilette*, and get her some clothes to travel in."

Lily was locked up, for the last time; but within an hour Madame came back with a fat old woman who had a lisp and the asthma, and whose splay, slowly crawling feet, in their roomy black list slippers, looked like a pair of turtle in mourning for their brethren who had been made by cruel epicures into soup. The fat old woman carried a big bundle beneath each arm, and Lily was speedily equipped in some faded but decent second-hand garments. The Countess sat by, inspecting the proceedings, and tapping the floor impatiently with her parasol. It was the second time, Lily remembered, that she had so been fitted out under inspection. The last time it was by Cutwig and Co.

Ten days afterwards they were in London. The Italian stayed behind. He seemed to bear separation from the Wild Woman—the Countess, I mean

—with great equanimity. She had for him, and had had always, the haughty and insolent indifference we feel for a person whose grade is beneath ours, but who is useful to us. Even in her lowest state she had treated the waxwork man du haut en bas.

“When I pay you a visit in London,” my empress, the Italian remarked, showing his white teeth, “you will have some macaroni for your Angelo, your Angelino, your Angeliotto—is it not so?”

“That depends,” she answered, tossing her head. “Can you let me have any more money?”

“Not a bajocco! You would devour as many millions as there are in my name. I have but four Louis d’or left, and I must have crowded houses at the show for a fortnight, or I shall starve.”

“That is your affair.”

“Yes, my duchess, that is my affair”—and the Italian showed his teeth again—“what a pity I did not put you on a pair of pasteboard wings, and show you as an angel instead of a Wild Woman. Well, I am not angry with you. Donna è mobile. When you are tired of England, and have lost your engagement through too many potations (you are too fond of cognac, my Zenobia), you will be glad enough to come back to your Angelo, and grate the cheese for his macaroni.”

“I hope not.”

"Yes you will. Till then, farewell. Take care of the Poverina"—this was Lily, and he patted her, not unkindly, on the shoulder—"and keep your hands off her. England is a good country, though the sun never shines there, and there are laws to protect the weak. Here, La Giustizia never interferes with you, unless your passport is out of order."

"I shall do what I like with my own."


"Precisely. Don't ill-treat your cat, or your dog, or whatever else is your own, then. Go, and be happy. Don't tear your new padrone's eyes out, if you can help it. What is his name? Il Signor Touticello—what is it? Dio mio! what a barbarous language it is!"

"His name is no business of yours. Tu m'em-bêtes, Ventimillioni. Que cela finisse!"

And so they parted. The Italian may have been a roving vagabond, not over-scrupulous as to morality; but he was a good-natured kind of fellow, and, when he showed his white teeth, looked quite amiable.

This is how Lily came back to England, and became acquainted with Ranelagh. She had become the attendant, the dresser, the drudge, the slave—call it what you will—of Madame Ernestine, the lady who was creating so great a sensation in the high school of horsemanship.

It was close on one o'clock in the morning, after



the Countess had gone to supper with her friends, that Lily had packed up such of her tyrant's effects as she ordinarily took home with her, and was ready to go home herself.

She knew the way to the gardens, and from the gardens, just as an imprisoned antelope in a menagerie may know its inner lair and its outer paddock, and the bars where the sight-seers stand to give it crumbs of cake. Beyond this there was a vasty void, only there were no visitors at the grate to give cakes to Lily.

They lived in a front parlour and bedroom, in a little one-story house in a by-street, close to the river-side. There was a scrap of garden in front, full of very big oleanders and sunflowers. The brass plate, too, which proclaimed that here was an academy for young ladies and gentlemen by Mr. Kafooze, seemed nearly as big as the little green door to which it was screwed. It was a tidy little house, in a tidy little street; only, as all the inhabitants did their washing at home, a smell rather too strongly pronounced, of soapsuds and damp linen, and the wash-tub generally, hung about it, morning, noon and night. All the little doors had big brass plates upon them. Mr. Kafooze's academy was flanked on one side by a lady who brought people into the world, and, when they had had enough of that ball, assisted them out of it, even to robing them for their journey; and, on

the other, by a distinguished foreigner from Oriental climes, who gave himself out simply as "Fung-yan, Chinese," as though the bare fact of that being his name and nation was amply sufficient to satisfy any purpose of legitimate curiosity. Fung-yan dressed in the European manner, and unless he wore his pigtail underneath his coat, had even parted with that celestial appendage. His smooth, india-rubber face, twinkling black eyes, and eternal simper, had made him not unpopular with the fair sex. He had even contrived to court, in pigeon-English, the widow of a retired publican with a small annuity, and, to the great scandal of some of the more orthodox Christians of the district, Mrs. Biff, formerly of the King of Prussia, licensed to sell, &c., had become Mrs. Fung-yan. Fung, however, was married at the parish church; it is true that he was accused of burning fireworks and sacrificing half a bushel of periwinkles to his joss in the back garden on the first evening of his honeymoon; but he kept his head high, paid his way, and extorted respect from the neighbourhood. Some said that he swept a crossing, in Chinese costume, for a living; others, that he went round the country swallowing molten 'sealing-wax, and producing globes full of gold fish from his stomach; a third party would have it that he assisted behind the counter of a tea-dealer in Leadenhall-street; while a fourth insisted that he was an interpreter

at a water-side police-court. I think, myself, that Fung-yan was a stevedore down in the docks, where years before he had arrived, a rice-fed, pig-tailed coolie on board an East Indiaman.

The night-watchman held his lantern up to Lily's face as she glided past him towards the water-gate of Ranelagh.

"Good-night, miss."

"Good-night, Mr. Buckleshaw."

"Have my great-coat, miss? It's woundy cold. I shan't miss it."

"Thank you, no, Mr. Buckleshaw. I am well wrapped up. Good-night again."

"It's a sin and a shame to send that poor young gal home at all hours o' night," grumbled the night-watchman, who was an old soldier, and testy and kind hearted, as old soldiers usually are. "It's a burning shame, and so it is. Them furriners don't seem to care a brass farden what becomes of their own flesh and blood. Such muck, too, as they live upon! The young gal ain't a furriner, though I wonder where that she-devil, who's sending the people crazy with her rough-riding, got hold of her. Well, it ain't no business of mine." And the night-watchman lighted another pipe, and addressed himself once more to the not very interesting task of crunching, with heavy footsteps, the frozen gravel.

The policemen on the beat knew Lily quite well,

and more than one cheery "Good-night, miss," greeted her on her way homeward. There was one gallant constable who, when he happened to be on night-duty, always insisted on seeing her to the corner of her street, which happened to be within the limits of his beat. While thus occupied—for Lily could not repel him, he was so civil and obliging—they passed the great inspector himself, in a short cape, and carrying a bamboo cane, and followed by a discreet sergeant.

The inspector stopped. The discreet sergeant, who was of a somewhat suspicious nature, turned his bull's-eye full on Lily, shook his head, and whistled as loudly as the rules of discipline, and his respect for his superior officer, would permit him to do.

"At your old tricks again, Drippan," the inspector remarked, severely. "Who is this young woman?"

Lily was terribly frightened. Drippan, however, who was the gallant constable, hastened to explain. Fortunately, the inspector had on more than one occasion patronised Ranelagh with his wife and family, and had seen Lily waiting for Madame Ernestine at the stage-door of the circus. He was quite satisfied with Constable Drippan's tale, and was good enough to tell Lily that, if she liked, a constable should escort her, so far as the

boundary of his beat permitted, towards her home, every night.

The next time Mr. Drippan met her he cleared up the mystery of the inspector's severity at their first meeting.

"Hi've got henemies, miss," he explained, "henemies has his sworn to 'ave my 'art's blood, let alone rewenging my good name, and reporting on me at the station when Hi ain't done nothink. I should be Hinspector Drippan but for those henemies."

Lily said she was very sorry.

"Well you may be," pursued this victim of malevolence. "Hi've bin druv from beat to beat in a way that's hawful. The minds of sergeants 'ave bin pisoned agin me, and Hi've bin put hunder stop-pages for nothink at all."

Lily told him she was very grieved, but was still somewhat puzzled to learn what his sorrow really was.

"Hi 'ave bin," he continued, in a dark whisper, "a perliceman in Grosvenor-square. Hi was huniversally respected and moved in the fust families. It was hall halong of a puffidious nussmaid as kep' company with a Fiend in Human Shape in the Life Guards. She split on me, and the cook—which had bin there seven year—lost her sitiwa-tion. Vy did the hinspector 'ave me up before the

commissioners, and play old Gooseberry with me? Because he were jealous. Because Hi 'ad put his nose outer joint. Ha!"

He paused, as though for sympathy, but Lily, not knowing precisely what to say, went on.

"They're hall'agin me. Hit's hall known at 'ed-quarters, and they'd as soon promote the fire-man's dog as me. Hi ham a parayur amongst my brother hofficers. Do Hi drink? Did Hi hever do the doss when on dooty? Let 'em prove their words. They ses Hi runs arter the gals. My 'art is blighted. They've sent me down to this jolly old South Lambeth, where there's nothink but cads, costermongers, and fried fish. Hi ham treated in the most exasperatin' way, and hif this sort o' thing's to go on, Hi'm blowed hif Hi don't write to the Weekly Dispatch."

I am ashamed to confess that little Lily—who, having had her own peines de cœur, should have learnt sympathy for another's woe—was not very forcibly impressed by this lamentable tale. I am afraid, indeed, that she was once or twice very near laughing. Poor soul, it was but little matter for mirth she had now. The gallant but unfortunate Drippan did not fail to mark her culpable indifference. From that night he offered to escort her no more; nay, once meeting her at her own street corner, he pretended not to know her, and even murmured, in muffled tone, the injurious

words, "Move on!" But Lily often met the inspector, and he had always a kind word for her.

She dared not go to bed, this night of the supper, until her tyrant came home, and when she had lighted a candle, and unpacked the bundle she had brought from Ranelagh, sat down in the little parlour to read. A Sunday newspaper was the only literary matter at hand, and she had read it through at least twice before since the beginning of the week; but she addressed herself again, and most industriously, to its perusal, going through all the advertisements of the splendid corner public-houses, the snug little free beer-shops, the eligible openings in the chandlery line, the unequalled tobacconists', stationery, and Berlin wool businesses for sale, wondering whether they all found purchasers, and whether it took six months or twelve for their lucky purchasers to realise large fortunes. And then she attacked the page devoted to theatricals, and read how Ranelagh was nightly the resort of the highest rank and fashion; how the experiment of a winter season had been a complete success, and how Mr. M'Variety was gaining golden opinions from all sorts of people. What were golden opinions, Lily wondered—money? If that were so, it was strange, for Mr. M'Variety was always grumbling to the Countess about the money he was losing. Then Lily went on to read about the Countess herself.

How Madame Ernestine was the cynosure of all eyes. How her youth, her beauty, her grace and agility were the delight of thousands, and how she had created, in the high school of horsemanship, a position in which she might have many imitators, but few compeers. A brief biography of the gifted equestrian followed this glowing criticism. Lily learnt, to her astonishment, that the Countess was of Spanish extraction—of a noble Andalusian family, indeed; that her mother (in the land of the dark mantilla and the bewitching cachuca) was known as the Pearl of Seville; but that reverses of fortune had forced her papa to adopt the lowly, but still honourable, profession of a matador. Educated in the Terpsichorean department of the Conservatory at Milan, the Countess had been instructed in the mysteries of the high school of horsemanship by an Arab sheik, assisted by the Master of the Horse to the Emperor of Austria. Her stud comprised an Andalusian barb, an Estremaduran jennet, a thorough-bred Arab from the Sahara, and a Persian filly from Tiflis. She had been married in early life to an English gentleman of high rank and vast wealth; but the union had not proved a happy one, and the gifted and beauteous Madame Ernestine was now a widow. She had gone through a series of the most startling and romantic adventures, and had received costly presents, mostly consisting of dia-

monds, from the majority of the sovereigns of Europe. She was eminently accomplished : being a mistress of five languages, and a skilful dancer, painter, and modeller of wax flowers. In age she might be bordering on her twenty-seventh year. Lily could not help asking herself, when she had come to the end of this astonishing narrative, whether it was all true ; whether the Countess was indeed the wonderful person they made her out to be ; or whether newspapers were even addicted to the practice for which the girls at her school used to be punished : to wit, lying.

It must have been nearly two in the morning when the landlord, Mr. Kafooze, knocked at her door, and asked if he might come in. The candle had a very long wick by this time, and Lily had laid down the imaginative newspaper, and was nodding wearily. She started at the landlord's voice, and bade him enter.

Mr. Kafooze was a very little old man, with a white smooth poll very like a billiard-ball, and reddish eyes, and no perceptible teeth, and a weak piping voice. He dressed habitually in black, had a limp wisp of white kerchief round his neck, and was, perhaps, the last man in South Lambeth who wore knee-breeches, black cotton hose, and plated buckles in his shoes. The small-clothes and buckles, added to his baldness, were of no small service to him among his neighbours.

Parents liked to send their children to a school of which the master looked at once so very clerical and so very scholastic. Mr. Kafooze's academy was on the humblest scale. Some twenty little boys and girls used to come there every morning and afternoon, to all appearance for three purposes: to crack nuts, to munch apples, and to pinch one another. When the last nut was cracked, the last apple devoured, and the last pinch-extracted squeal uttered, school was dismissed. The pupils generally went home black and blue, so far as their arms were concerned, but not through any corporal chastisement inflicted by Mr. Kafooze. That placid old man had not so much as a halfpenny cane in his academy. His assistant in the business of education was his niece, a humpbacked young person, with red hair, and a firmament of freckles on her countenance, who revelled in the somewhat exceptional name of Rhodope, who passed the major portion of her time either in endeavouring to mollify the bunions with which she was troubled, or in relating ghost stories (of which she had a vast stock) in an under tone to the three senior pupils. Mr. Kafooze sat apart at a little desk, and when the scholars were unusually noisy, would tell them mildly that they were "worse than bluebottles." He was generally intent on the contemplation of a celestial globe, and when he had (as it seemed, being short

sighted) smelt at this orb for many minutes, he would rush away to his desk, bury his nose in a quire of foolscap, and cover at least two pages with blots, scrawls, dashes, and hieroglyphical characters of strange design. Whence arose, even among Mr. Kafooze's most friendly critics, a rumour that he was engaged in the discovery of the perpetual motion, to be accomplished by means of clockwork and balloons, and that he had, in furtherance of his scientific ends, entered into a compact with the Evil One. But everybody agreed that "he knew a deal," and was exceedingly genteel in his manners.

"It's only me, my dear," piped Mr. Kafooze, entering the parlour with a little lamp in one hand. With the disengaged hand, which was so thin and shrivelled as to be well-nigh transparent, he shaded the light from Lily.

"You watch late to-night," he resumed, in his weak treble. "Hasn't your mamma come home yet?"

"Madame is supping with some friends," Lily answered, quietly. "Madame" was a discreet compromise into the use of which she had been drilled by the Wild Woman. "Dare to call me anything else, and I will skin you alive, you viper," was her amiable warning to her dependent.

"Ah! it's no business of mine. She's a very good lodger, when she's in a good temper, and has

every right to her latch-key. I hope she's enjoying herself. What a famous schoolmistress your mamma would make! Ah! she'd make the little ones mind, I warrant you. They don't mind me a bit, nor my niece Rhodope."

"But you, Mr. Kafooze," said Lily, who was accustomed to the little old man, who often came in at night for a quiet gossip, "you are up very late, too."

"Oh! I, my dear young lady, I'm always up late. It's my way. I've so much to do. I sit up with the stars."

Lily thought Mr. Kafooze's fellow-watchers were most delightful company, and told him, almost enthusiastically, that she loved to sit up and look at the stars.

"Ah! that isn't it, exactly," rejoined Mr. Kafooze, shaking his head, and with a half sigh. "Twinkle, twinkle, little star, and all that sort of thing. I read the stars, my dear, and have come to know them. Deary me! but there's a deal more to be learnt about them," he added, with another sigh.

"And what do they tell you, Mr. Kafooze?" asked Lily.

"A deal that's good, and a deal that's bad, my dear," the star-gazer replied. "They tell me little that's worth knowing about myself, however. If the stars would be good enough to inform me how

it is that I can't earn more than two pound a week, I'd be obliged to them, that's all. The stars, my dear, I can tell you in confidence, have been my stumbling-blocks all through life. My father turned me out of doors, and cut me off—not with a shilling, but without one—all owing to the stars. I attribute my failure in the haberdashery line in the year 'twenty-three, entirely to the stars. I published a 'Voice from the Stars' in the shape of an almanack, for three years running, and lost a very pretty penny by it. And now I've come down to what you see. But I trust in the stars as firmly as ever; and indeed my motive in looking in upon you to-night, was to ask you whether you could tell me what star your mamma was born under. I shouldn't like to ask her myself, for you see she has rather a quick temper."

"I am sure I don't know, Mr. Kafooze," replied Lily, "but I will ask her, if you like."

"For goodness' sake, don't, my dear young lady," Mr. Kafooze interposed, hastily. "She's a remarkable woman, is your mamma, and she might do something dreadful if you were inquisitive about her affairs. I thought that perhaps she might have mentioned something to you incidentally about the stars."

"I do not know, Mr. Kafooze," said Lily, very sadly, who felt somehow impelled to place confidence in the little bald-headed schoolmaster, "whe-

ther she is my mamma or not. One day she tells me she is; but the next she denies it, and forbids me to call her anything but Madame. I know that she treats me very unkindly, and that I am very unhappy, Mr. Kafooze."

She buried her face in her hands. She could not help the confession. It was the first wail—the first outcry under cruel agony.

"Hush, hush!" piped the schoolmaster; "you mustn't cry, you mustn't fret, my dear. That would never do. You'll wake the lodger up—as worthy a young man as ever lived, and plays the trombone at Ranelagh for five-and-twenty shillings a week."

He sat down by her side on the little horse-hair sofa, and fell to chafing one of her little hands between his own parchment palms.

"Don't mind me," he quavered; "I'm old enough to be your great-grandfather. I'm seventy-two, but I don't fret now; I leave it all to the stars."

Lily dried her eyes, and admitted that she had been very foolish, and besought the schoolmaster not to tell Madame of what had passed.

"It is not that she strikes me," she explained. "She is always threatening, but she has seldom gone beyond a push, and has never gone so far as she did to-night when she menaced me with her horsewhip. But oh, Mr. Kafooze, she strikes me

with her tongue—with her cruel, cruel tongue. Night and day she browbeats and insults me. What am I to do? You have seen me here. How am I to conciliate her? How have I offended her? Do I look, do I act, like a bad, wicked girl?"

"You are a little angel, my dear," quoth old Mr. Kafooze; "a dear, persecuted angel; but you must not fret. You must leave it to time and to the stars. They will make it all right. I won't say that they will avenge you; because vengeance does not belong to the stars."

Lily could only repeat that she was very unhappy—that she did everything she could to please her hard task-mistress, and that it was not her fault.

"It's nobody's fault, my dear," urged the little schoolmaster. "Nobody but Destiny's. I've been fighting against Destiny for threescore years and ten, and she's had her heel upon me, and trampled me under foot many and many a time. But I'll get the best of her, and have her under *my* foot, the jade!" he concluded, clenching his bony hand, and in a most valorous pipe.

The sound of a key was heard turning in the door.

"That's your mamma," quoth he, hastily. "I wouldn't have her see me here for twenty pound. Good-night, my dear. Your mamma's got a destiny too; only I want to know more about her star

before I can tell you what it is. I'm afraid it's a bad one." And Mr. Kafooze vanished.

Two persons came into the little parlour: one was the Countess, flushed and radiant, the other was Thomas Tuttleshell, Esquire. That gentleman Lily had never before seen; but the Countess had often spoken of him as a fellow who had been useful to her. She had, decidedly, but few surplus funds in the way of gratitude, our Countess, and dispensed them very grudgingly.

She had torn off her mantle, had flung herself on to the sofa, and sat in her gay dress, fanning herself. Lily had seen her as hot and as excited after her performance in the French booth as the Wild Woman; but she seemed scarcely the same being now. She was different in mien, in voice, in gesture. She was transformed.

Thomas Tuttleshell had escorted her from supper, but whither afterwards, Lily knew not. It was certain that Madame and her friends were not in the gardens when the girl left. Perhaps Sir William Long had still chambers where he could conjure up the image of his old parties. Perhaps Thomas knew of some quiet hotel in the neighbourhood of St. James's, where, even after supper hours, guests who wished to talk, and smoke, and drink champagne, were welcome.

"It's very late — very late indeed," was the

courteous remark of the Countess to Thomas, as she flung away her fan, and gave a great yawn; "you had better go home."

"Much obliged to you," thus Thomas; "but allow me at least to apologise for keeping this pretty young lady, whom I presume to be your daughter, up to such a very unseemly hour. You see, miss, that your mamma——"

"*My servant* needs none of your apologies," the Countess interrupted, with her old haughtiness. "If she complained of waiting up early or late, just as it suited my good will and pleasure, I'd break every bone in her skin."

"It would be a pity to hurt such pretty bones."

"Never mind whether they are ugly or pretty. They are none of yours. They are mine. Now, go away, there's a good man. I am tired to death."

"Allow me at least to light a cigar. It's deuced cold."

"I do not allow smoking in my apartments."

"By Jove, Ernestine," cried the usually placable Tom, losing all patience under these continual rebuffs, "you're very different now from what you were when I took you off the boards in France. Why, but for the few Louis that Italian fellow won at the trente et quarante, you wouldn't have had a shoe to your foot."

"I have nothing to do with what I was yester-

day. It is enough for me to think of what I am to-day, and what I may be to-morrow." Spoken like a brave and consistent Countess.

"At least," remonstrated Tom, "you might remember that I got you a good engagement, and, as an old friend, am at least entitled to a little consideration."

"A fig for your engagements," the woman cried, snapping her fingers; "a fig for the miserable ten pounds a week which your master, M'Variety, gives me. Dix livres sterling. Je me mouche avec ces gages-là!"

"You were glad enough to get them, when I offered the engagement to you at Lyons, and lent you the money to come over to England."

"I might have been. It is so very long ago. In the century before last, I think. Chantez-moi quelque chose de nouveau."

"It was this very summer," grumbled Tom.

"A fig for last summer! a fig for my old friends. Je m'en fiche!" the woman cried. "I have found other old friends—and superb ones, too. I have been in the mud long enough. Now I am about to revenge myself."

"Then I suppose you don't want to see me any more. I wish you a very good-night." Tom was going away in dudgeon.

On the contrary, the Countess condescended to explain, "I want to see you every day. You can

be very useful to me, l'oncle Thomas. Allons, soyons amis, mon vieux. Tapez-là."

She held out her hand in a scornful manner to Mr. Tuttleshell, who took it, and bowed somewhat stiffly, for he was still but ill pleased, and was going, when the Countess started up and placed herself between him and the door.

"No, we are not going to part like that," she cried, half sarcastically, and half caressingly. "Pas de rancune, mon brave. You must continue to serve me. I want you here to-morrow morning. I want to talk to you before ces messieurs arrivent. Is not to-morrow—to-day, rather, I would say—Saturday? Have they not promised to so call? Am I not to dine with them, there being a relâche at the gardens? Allons, donnez-moi la patte."

She had still, though haggard and ruddled, a cajoling kind of way about her which was not ineffective. Tom gave her his hand this time in perfect amity, and, promising to be with her again before noon, took his leave.

He had been slyly examining Lily while parleying with the Countess. "By Jove! what a pretty little thing," quoth Thomas Tuttleshell, Esquire, as he put Mr. Kafooze's brass plate between himself and the parlour. "What a pity she should have such an old tigress for a mother. Clever woman, though. Fiendishly clever. In her day, superb. Sadly fallen off, though. I suppose the little one

is her daughter. I wonder what Billy Long's game is. He's sown his wild oats; yet they're a sly lot, these swells: always up to something. He said to-night's meeting was as good as a thousand pounds to him. I wish he'd give me five hundred on account. Heigho! C-a-b!" And Tom Tuttle-shell hailed a four-wheeler, and was driven home to bed.


CHAPTER VIII.

DREAMLAND.

It was a very long time since the girl had dreamed. How could she dream, she had no time. Her life had been wakeful, and hard, and cruel. She had been bedded on no soft pillow, dandled to sleep in no loving arms. Every one around her had been awake, and watchful to strike at her. Tranquil slumbers and bright visions she had just tasted of, here and there, and for a moment ; but they had been rudely broken, and intervals of long years rolled between. Sometimes, as a quiet and not unhappy little child, the plaything of the school at Stockwell, she had dreamed, nestling in the soothing shadow of the Miss Bunnycastle's skirts. Then she had certainly dreamed for a whole afternoon at the Greenwich dinner, and for a whole day

at Cutwig and Co.'s. A brief and blissful dream had been her sojourn at Madame de Kergolay's; but the waking up only seemed the ruder and more dreadful. Since she had groaned under the sway of the horrible woman, who, in her paint and out of her paint, on the boards and off the boards, was always wild, and capricious, and intolerable, she had forgotten what it was to dream, or rather she had been as one walking in her sleep, mobile, eyes wide open and unconscious. So she might have gone on, to find herself, at last, a dull, stupified, apathetic drudge, too crushed and listless to be discontented. But this was not to be. A great change was fated to come over her. She was to dream again, and, for a time, delightfully.

The change began on the very morning after the notable supper of the Countess with her old friends. She ceased, suddenly, to treat Lily in the same manner as heretofore. She was no longer brutal, sarcastic, impatient with her. She had her old temper, our Countess; but when she found that she was losing, or, the rather, on the point of giving way to her temper, she would bite her lips, and stamp her foot, and crisp her fingers, until the fit had passed off. Her self-control was wonderful. Lily was astounded at it; and Mr. Kafooze, at first puzzled, was ultimately led to ascribe the alteration to the conjunction of some more favourable planets in the horoscope. The cardinal point



in the mild, although somewhat muddled, philosophy of the little old schoolmaster was neither to praise nor to censure his fellow-creatures for anything. If things went badly, he bowed to the fiat of the stars ; and if they went well, he thanked the stars for it. Perhaps, all things considered, one might have a worse system of philosophy than the Kafoozian.

They had visitors in the humble little sitting-room the morrow of the supper. The curiosity of the street was all agog when the distinguished visitors arrived. They came in private carriages—in a Brougham and pair and a cabriolet. The tiger attached to the latter vehicle, a youth of rosy countenance and confident mien, descended into Mr. Kafooze's garden, plucked two roses, stuck one of the flowers in his horse's headstall, and another in his own button-hole, and then gave himself up to whistling, not defiantly, but with an air of cheerful superiority to things in general, and South Lambeth in particular.

Fung-yan, Chinese, who happened to be at home at the time (he always returned at noon to lunch on liver and bacon, rice, and bottled stout), came out to his front door, and surveyed the scene with his never-failing simper, just as his three hundred million prototypes simper as they cross the bridge on the willow pattern plate, or parch tea-leaves in copper-pans, surrounded by flowery gardens and

curly pagodas, on the grocers' chests. Most of the inhabitants of the street, however, were of opinion that the visit had something to do with a projected railway, the proximate driving of which through their quiet street, and consequent demolition of their dwellings, kept them in a chronic state of apprehension; while two or three ladies of mature age shook their heads, and opined that it was no business of theirs, but that some people had no sense of what was right and proper, especially foreign horse-riders. It was enough to make decent Christian people—having paid rates and taxes for years, and brought up large families most respectable—believe the world was coming to an end, and to cause the bones of their (the Christian bodies') grand-parents to turn in their graves.

Meanwhile, the visitors, quite unconscious of these conflicting criticisms, had made their way into the little parlour. School was just breaking up as they passed through the passage, and, during the hour of recreation, the juvenile scholars of Mr. Kafooze played with much zest at being a double-knock, at being a gentleman in a white hat, at being a gentleman with a gold-rimmed eye-glass, and, in particular, at being carriages and horses.

Lily had been hurried, but not unkindly, into the back bedroom, when the double-knock announced the arrival of the illustrious party. They were five in number. They were the Pilgrims,

plus one; and the additional person was Mr. M'Variety.

"What do you want here?" was the Countess's agreeable salutation to her director (she could not be amiable to everybody); "do you want to raise my salary?"

"Don't mind if I do," returned the enterprising manager. "You're certainly drawing. I wish everybody else did as well; but the Veiled Prophet of Khorassan, you remember, the Swedish Albino who used to do the Living Skeleton at Rosherville, and, as a child, was exhibited as the phenomenon with the words Princess Charlotte plainly visible on the pupil of one eye, and, on the other, Leopold of Sacobble—supposed to mean Saxe Coburg—from whom I expected great things, has turned out a regular swindle. The confounded idiot has had the measles; and now he's got over them, he's getting quite fat and good-looking."

The Countess had only heard the first few words of his remarks. Long before the manager had finished, she was engrossed by the conversation of her more aristocratic guests. How heartily she despised M'Variety in her secret self. What a vulgar, presuming, self-sufficient, under-bred fellow he was! But the rest? Ah, they were true gentlemen. How affable, and easy, and gracious was Milor Carlton. What a grand manner—and a kind one too, for all his dryness—had Sir William

Long, Baronet. And Edgar Greyfaunt, the Sultan Greyfaunt, perfumed, and curled, and oiled, like a gorgeous potentate in Vathek, the Sultan in a braided pelisse and a sealskin waistcoat. "Il a l'air grand seigneur, celui-là," she muttered. "C'est un lion pur sang. Il a un peu le ton Parisien. C'est peut-être un milord qui a flâné longtemps sur le Boulevard de Gand." And to Edgar she was especially gracious.

On Thomas Tuttleshell, even, she smiled; but she took occasion to whisper to him:

"You never came this morning, false man. So you still bear malice?"

"Not a bit," returned Thomas, in the same low tone; "you gave me a deuce of a reception last night; snowballs and red-hot flat-irons, by way of a change, were nothing to it. However, that's all over now. I would have come this morning, but we were up late, and I was tired to death." Although Thomas was one of the most obliging of mankind, he had a reasonable sense of what was due to his dignity, and did not like to make himself *too* cheap.

"As you please," the Countess rejoined, turning away. "We will have our confidential talk another time." However nettled she might have been by Thomas's apparent neglect, she took care (for good reasons of her own, doubtless) not to show it then or there, and was studiously civil to him. "Messeigneurs," she continued, "can I offer you

anything? The wines of South Lambeth are, I am afraid, not of the premiers crûs—the first vintages; but, if you desired it, the neighbourhood should be scoured to procure beverages worthy of you. Will you smoke, Messieurs? Illumine your cigars, by all means. I will not do you the injustice to suppose that I could offer you any so good as those which are in your cases.”

The gentlemen hastened to disclaim any wish to resort to the deleterious practice she expressed herself willing to tolerate, and assured her that her conversation was already sufficiently delightful without any extraneous aids. By-and-by, Sir William Long gently suggested that she had made them, overnight, a certain promise.

“Ah,” she returned, with seeming carelessness, “I know—my little girl. I promised to introduce her to you, did I not? It was a venturesome pledge on my part. Vous êtes par trop mauvais sujets, mes nobles seigneurs. However, you shall see that I can keep my word. Do you really wish to see the child? She is but a little bit of a thing, and quite timid and awkward.”

“If she is half as charming as her mamma,” Lord Carlton observed, gallantly, “she must be charming indeed.”

“Flatterer! How do you know that I am her mamma? *Ai-je l’air d’une mère, moi?*” The vain woman plumed herself as she spoke. She was

really beginning to imagine that she was young again. "But you shall see her. Excuse me for a few moments, and I will present her to you. You are sure that I cannot offer you anything?"

"Don't think you can," put in plain-speaking Mr. M-Variety. "Tisn't very likely these gents could drink the kind of stuff you would be likely to get from the public-house at the corner. If I'd only thought of it, now, I'd have brought a bottle of champagne in his lordship's carriage."

"With his lordship's permission," Mr. Tuttle-shell gently hinted, in an under tone.

"With nobody's permission but my own, Mr. Tom Toady," the manager, who was quick of speech sometimes, retorted.

Thomas looked discomposed, and his lordship laughed. Mr. M-Variety's bluntness rather amused than offended him. It could certainly never be alleged against the enterprising manager that he was an adulator of the great. He was fond of the society of the "tiptoppers," as he called them, made much of them, and treated them with great liberality and hospitality; but he never cringed to or bowed down before them. He had often been known to swear at a lord who got in a carpenter's way behind the scenes; but it was difficult to be offended with him: he swore so very good humouredly and respectfully. He was quite as affable

and quite as hospitable in the society of the gentleman who contracted for the train oil to supply the lamps of Ranelagh, the inspector of police, and the tradesman who manufactured pork-pies for the refreshment-room.

Madame Ernestine went away into the next room; and poor Thomas had rather a hard time of it until her return. That unlucky observation about his lordship's permission brought on his head a number of cutting things. Mr. Greyfaunt was secretly delighted that the harmless client had been put down. Mr. M'Variety hastened, however, to smoothe Thomas's ruffled pinions.

"A right good fellow is Tom," he observed; "only he will put in his oar sometimes where it isn't wanted. Never mind, Tom; if I've hurt your feelings, I'm sorry for it."

It was difficult for Mr. Tuttleshell to be angry with any human being for more than five seconds at a time; and he was assuring M'Variety of his entire belief that he would do nothing willingly to wound his feelings, when the Countess entered the parlour.

She brought Lily with her. She had some womanly grace and ingenuity left, this Wild Woman, and, during the few minutes she had been absent, had disposed some ribbons and scraps of lace about the girl's dress, which made her look

quite smart. She was very pale, poor little Lily; but her soft brown hair and trusting eyes were beautiful.

"Merciful Heaven!" cried the baronet, starting up. "She's not a bit changed. It's only the dear little girl we saw at Greenwich grown into a woman."

But Lily had grown paler and paler. Flashes of crimson came, transient, across the deadly whiteness of her cheek. But she trembled all over, and stretched forth her hands before her as though her sight were failing her, and she was feeling her way. At length she gave a feeble cry, staggered, and would have fallen, but that the Countess caught her in her arms.

"I thought so," she muttered between her teeth.

She bore her into the bedroom, poured water on a handkerchief, damped her forehead and chafed her hands. The girl soon revived. The Countess bade her lie on the bed and keep quiet, and she would soon be quite well again. "Sly little imp," she muttered again, as she passed into the sitting-room. "Ah, I thought so, I thought so. Thou couldst not deceive me, little Jesuit."

She found her visitors in great perturbation at the untoward occurrence.

"It is nothing," she explained. "I told you. She is a mere child, and has hitherto lived in virtuous retirement." She said this with a grin.

"She was alarmed at the sight of so many strangers, but she is already recovered, and will soon be herself again. I was just as timid at her age." And she grinned again. She was not pleasant to look upon when she grinned. She strove to engage her guests in conversation; but it manifestly flagged. She saw their eyes continually directed towards the closed door, and she hugged herself in her secret soul. She went into the bedroom once or twice, and came out saying that the patient was better, but too much frightened to confront the strangers again. And at last, with great amiability, but sufficient plainness, she told them that she had a rehearsal at the gardens, and must beg them to excuse her until dinner.

"That's a crammer," whispered the enterprising manager to Thomas Tuttleshell; "there's not so much as a donkey rehearsing at our shop this morning." Whether his enterprise for the moment happened to be a playhouse, an Italian Opera, a garden, a circus, a giant, a dwarf, a concert-room, a chapel, or a wild-beast show, Mr. M'Variety always alluded to it as a shop.

"I suppose something's gone wrong," said Tom, in a return whisper, "and she wants to get rid of us. We'd better be off, Mac."

There was clearly nothing left but for the visitors to go. The Countess's face was wreathed with smiles; but there was no mistaking the gesture

with which she showed them the door. She bade them adieu until dinner, which was to take place, it was arranged, at some hotel in the West-end. Mr. M'Variety was to be of the party, and the manager whispered, as he passed out, that he had a proposition to make of a nature which might not be wholly displeasing to her. "Decidedly," she thought, "he means to raise my salary." Her views, however, were too ambitious, just then, to be satisfied with a mere two or three pounds added to her weekly stipend.

His lordship's Brougham would call for her at six o'clock. That was clearly as it should be, and another triumph. She was evidently resuming her proper station in society. It must have been at least a thousand years ago that she was the ruddled and drunken Wild Woman who used to go about the fairs, and exhibit herself to the bumpkins at so many liards a head. She had always been a lady of fashion—of the very highest fashion. Of course. Yet, for all that, when the visitors had taken their departure, she sent out Mr. Kafooze's humpbacked niece for a little brandy, the which that meek young person, who was half servitor and half governess, brought in from the adjacent public-house, with a corner of her ink-stained apron thrown over the bottle.

It may here be not inappropriately remarked, that as Mr. M'Variety was following in the wake

of his illustrious visitors, he met little Mr. Kafooze in the passage, and that, in the most affable manner, he immediately smote the schoolmaster on the shoulder, and inflicted a playful dig beneath one of his ribs. "What the dickens brings you here, my moonraker?" was the inquiry of the manager of Ranelagh.

"Why, I live here, Mr. M'Variety," the little man replied, rubbing his hands together, with somewhat of an uneasy expression of countenance.

"Live here! Why, I thought you didn't live anywhere, unless it was in the moon."

"There's my name on the door-plate, Mr. M'Variety. I keep a school. I keep a little school, to eke out a livelihood. Times are very hard, and I don't get much of a salary at the gardens, as you know sir, although I've been there these five-and-twenty years."

"These five hundred years, you mean. And so you keep a school? What a rum 'un you are, to be sure. Find it pay? Eh! my noble star-gazer?"

"Pretty well, Mr. M'Variety; only you'll oblige me if you won't mention it. It's really very important that you shouldn't mention it. It might do me harm with the parents. You see, sir, that this is a very pious neighbourhood, and party feeling runs dreadfully high. I might lose all my pupils if it were known that I had any engagement—you understand—that I had anything

to do with the gardens. Parents are so very prejudiced, you know; and people who grumble at having to pay half a guinea a quarter, make as much fuss about it as if they were sending their young ones to the University of Oxford."

"All right, my Trojan. By-by, Kafooze." And Mr. M'Variety walked away. "Queer little customer that," he mused; "who'd ever have thought of his keeping a school, and teaching the young idea how to shoot. I wonder if he tells the young 'uns anything about the stars. He's a good deal more than three parts cracked is Kafooze; but he's well up to his business, and is as worthy a little soul as ever breathed. Curious, now, that man believes in all the humbug he's paid five-and-twenty shillings a week to cram down people's throats. He believes in it as strongly as if he got twenty pounds a week. He's not a bad sort, and is worth every penny of his sal to me. Egad! I'll put him down for a snuff-box some of these fine days."

It was one of the most amiable traits in Mr. M'Variety's character to be continually presenting snuff-boxes to the persons in his employ. There was scarcely a carpenter, a scene-painter, a property-man, a lamplighter, or a fiddler in his service, who had not been, at some period or another, gratified with one of these tokens of the manager's esteem and confidence. Mr. M'Variety purchased

them cheap, at the pawnbroker's ; and with the old inscriptions burnished out (for it frequently happened that they had done service previously, as gifts to deserving employés) they looked quite beautiful. Indeed, it was rumoured that, in this manner, the manager had often to buy his own testimonials back again. Times had never been so hard with Mr. M'Variety as to render it impossible for him to dispense at least two sets of these snuff-boxes in the course of a season. Once, when business was dreadfully bad, he had been forced to come down to tortoiseshell ; but the pull up of a good benefit was speedily the means of the precious metal asserting its accustomed sway.

A remarkable interview took place in the afternoon between the Countess and Lily. The former had told her that she was to dine out that evening with some gentlemen—the gentlemen she had seen that forenoon, in fact—and bade her get on her bonnet and shawl. They would take a cab, she said, to the other side of the water, and purchase some articles of dress ; for the dinner was to be a very grand one, and she wished Lily to appear as smart as possible.

To the Countess's astonishment—to her simulated astonishment, perchance—the girl cast herself at her feet, and, with passionate entreaties, begged to be allowed to remain at home. And, again, she implored her not to ask her the reason of her

reluctance to attend the dinner. She would rather be beaten, locked up, starved, than confess that reason.

She was sincere; although, Heaven knows, she was interceding in her own despite, and uttering entreaties against herself. She had seen Edgar. She saw him: handsome, happy, and splendid. She would have given the world to be allowed to speak to him, to look him full in the eyes, to touch his kid-gloved hand. To sit by his side at dinner, to be in his company a whole evening, to listen to his voice, to see him eat and drink, would have been to her ineffable bliss. But she dared not confront it. It would be happiness leading only to her destruction, and her death. If she saw him again, she must once more fly, once more bury herself. She felt that she loved him more than ever, and that to give reins to her love was to court ruin, and invite despair.

And Edgar Greyfaunt! Had he seen her? Had he recognised her when she swooned? Yes; the Sultan's eyes had condescended to light on the horse-rider's little drudge. He had felt flattered and gratified when he was aware of the influence his presence had produced on her. He was gratified, but not grateful. The girl's fainting away was naturally the subject of conversation among the Pilgrims when they had left the house. Sir William Long was driving Greyfaunt in his cab-

riole to town; and the Sultan did not long delay in hinting that he knew something of the "little party" who had been so suddenly the means of breaking up the interview with the Countess.

"I think I've made something like an impression in that quarter," he remarked, with an infinite fatuity of complacency.

Sir William Long repressed his first impulse, which, I am afraid, was to lift up the cab apron and fling Mr. Edgar Greyfaunt over one of the big wheels upon the freshly macadamised pavement of the Westminster-road.

"Indeed," he rejoined, biting his lip. "I was not aware that you had ever seen Madame Ernestine's daughter before."

"Madame Anybody's daughter," the young man went on, carelessly. "She must be a kind of foundling, I fancy. The little party and I are old friends."

"Old friends?"

"Yes. My aunt, Madame de Kergolay, picked her up from some snuffy old priest in Paris, whose niece she was said to be. You understand. A priest's niece! Queer kind of relationship, that. The aunt never turns up, somehow. Stop, I think the little party was at some school where they ill treated her. Well, *my* aunt, who was always picking up waifs and strays of some sort—it didn't much matter whether they were puppies or cats,

or children, or china monsters—took a great fancy to this little Lily. Yes; that was her name.”

Sir William Long winced. He had another, and stronger impulse: to shorten his whip and lay the lash handsomely about the shoulders of the Sultan Greyfaunt; but he controlled himself again, and observed,

“A very pretty name, I think, Mr. Greyfaunt?”

“Not so pretty as Leopoldine. I knew a little woman by the name of Leopoldine. By Jove, what a little devil she was! She used to live in the Rue de Seine. Well, Madame de Kergolay grew quite fond of our little party. She turned out badly, however.”

“Turned out badly, Mr. Greyfaunt? What do you mean?” Sir William’s voice quivered as he spoke. He was very nearly saying, “What the devil do you mean?”

“At all events, she gave my aunt a great deal of trouble. She used to say that she was shockingly hypocritical and deceitful. One day she gave the little party a tremendous wiggling, whereupon, her monkey being up, Miss Lily bolted.”

“Do you mean to say that the poor friendless young creature ran away?”

“That’s it, Sir William. Unfortunate Miss Bailey, and all the rest of it, though she didn’t hang herself in her garters. I’m afraid that the

real state of the case was, that she had become smitten with your humble servant. I'm sure I couldn't help it. It was no fault of mine that she took a fancy to me. My aunt, who was a very soft-hearted old lady, was very much cut up when she found that the bird had flown. Would have given a good deal, I day say, to get her back. But it was no use; they couldn't find the least trace of her; and now she turns up in the company of that horrible old horse-riding woman. Faugh! how she smells of brandy. How, in the name of all that's wonderful, she and Lily came together, passes my comprehension."

"It is indeed wonderful; but am I to understand, Mr. Greyfaunt, that it is your intention to continue to pay your attentions to this young lady?"

"How deuced solemn and formal you are, to be sure. But you're rather out in your reckoning. In the first place, it's rather stretching a point to call the little party a young lady. Persons of gentle blood are usually chary as to how they apply that appellation. You and I are men of old family, and don't sow the names of 'lady' and 'gentleman' broadcast."

"Indeed! What would you call this unfortunate child—this young woman—then? I have every reason to believe that she is the daughter of

this Madame Ernestine, and she, I know positively, is the widow of an English gentleman of very gentle blood indeed."

"You astonish me. I shouldn't have thought she had ever gone higher in the marriage line than a groom or a harlequin. However, we will call the little party whatever you please. I ordinarily speak of this description of persons as *ces gens*—people. As for paying attentions to her, you are again slightly in error. I never paid her any. It was all on the other side of the hedge. *Je me suis laissé aimer*. The little party took a fancy to me, and for that you will, I hope, agree I am not to blame. I don't think I ever had ten minutes' continuous conversation with her. There is time, nevertheless, to improve the acquaintance. Ah! here we are in Whitehall. I have a call to make at the Foreign Office. Thank you for the lift. *Au revoir* until dinner-time."

"And it is for this senseless, brainless puppy that Lily has made herself miserable," Sir William Long muttered, as he drove furiously away. "Confound the coxcomb, I should have liked to twist his neck."

CHAPTER XI.

THE COTTAGE.

THE proposition made by Mr. M'Variety to the Countess that evening, at dinner (a repast, by the way, at which Lily was *not* present), was essentially satisfactory to that lady. It was of a duplex nature. First, it had reference to the augmentation of Madame Ernestine's weekly stipend; and, sundry pounds and shillings being added thereto, the Countess vouchsafed to express her opinion that Mr. M'Variety was "*un bon enfant*," and exceptionally free from the vice of stinginess, inherent, if she were to be believed, to the managerial tribe.

"You needn't give me credit for too much generosity," the candid manager observed, in return for the Countess's somewhat profuse expressions of

gratitude, "even when I tell you that your sal can go on, if you like, all the winter. The concern doesn't pay, nor anything like it; and I must shut up very soon, or, by Jove, I shall be shut up myself; but that will have nothing to do with your engagement. I mean to come out with a bang next spring, so you can be practising something stunning in the high school way between this and next Easter. Open or shut, you'll find the ghost walk every Saturday at three P.M., military time; and if ever you want a fiver on account, you'll find Billy Van Post always ready to honour your I O U. Sounds very liberal, don't it? You needn't imagine, for all that, that I'm one of the Brothers Cheeryble. The fact is, Countess, that what suits your book suits my book, and that's all about it."

As he spoke, Mr. M'Variety slapped, perchance involuntarily, his waistcoat-pocket. Of course Madame Ernestine, not being a clairvoyant, could not see, through the well-shrunk tweed and glazed calico lining of that garment, a neatly-folded slip of paper of a dull grey hue, which, had it been opened, would have proved to be a cheque, the amount of which has nothing to do with this recital, drawn in favour of J. M'Variety, Esq., or bearer, by a person signing himself William Long. But, morally, Madame Ernestine had cut all her eye-teeth, and could see through a millstone or a

plaid waistcoat as well as her neighbours ; and she understood the enterprising manager perfectly well when he hinted that it was not through any spontaneous intuition of munificence, but for divers reasons well known to himself, that he proposed to prolong her engagement on terms so exceedingly favourable.

“ And, while we’re talking business,” continued the manager, “ I don’t see why you should go on wasting your sweetness on the desert air in that poky little hole where I found you this morning. Old Foozlum”—it was by this irreverent name that M’Variety called the Ruler of the Planets—“ is a very good sort of a card ; but he’s a desperate slow coach ; his house ain’t much bigger than a mouse-trap, and there isn’t an inch of style about him.”

“ Who is this Monsieur Kafooze ? ” the Countess asked, turning quickly on her interlocutor. “ *Quelle est cette vieille ganache qui me conte toujours des balivernes sur les étoiles ?* Whence comes he, this idiotic old schoolmaster, with his moons, and his stars, and his other impertinences ? ”

“ Poor old Foozlum. There’s no harm about him. How sharp you do take one up, to be sure ! I suppose he’s a right to let lodgings, and be a little cracked, as long as he don’t bite anybody, if he likes. I was quite staggered this morning to find out what he was in the daytime.”

"And what is he at night? A clown, a man-baboon, a lamplighter, a fiddler, a joueur de cornemuse?"

"That's tellings. Ask me no questions, and—you know the rest. Billy Van Post's got him down in the pay list, and he draws his sal pretty regular. That's all we've any of us any right to know. It ain't much, but he's worth his salt to me, and more. However, it isn't about old Foozlum that we're talking. His shabby little rattletrap of a place ain't good enough for you and missy to live in, let alone receiving your friends. You want some place more stylish—something slap up."

"I don't want to live in town," the Countess returned. "I cannot afford to keep a carriage—there were days when I kept two—and in eight days I should be ruined in cabs."

"Don't want you to be ruined in anything. Don't want you to live at the West-end. You'd be getting into some devilry there. Why don't you come to the Cottage, you and missy?"

"The Cottage, where is that?"

"Don't you know that queer old crib behind the ball-room. Two hundred years old, they say it is. I think it is a thousand. There's a good many rats, and a ghost or two, but it's very picturesque, and in tol lol repair. Besides, it won't cost you a penny for rent or taxes, and old Mrs. Snuffburn—thats the Ranelagh housekeeper, you know—who's been there ever since the time of Gog and

Magog, will see that you're all right and comfortable."

The Countess was nothing loth.

"But," she said, as though making terms, "I shall be able to see all my friends there, Monsieur Mac?"

"The whole boiling of 'em. Tom, Dick, and Harry. Lords and ladies—whoever you please."

"Au bout du compte, elle me va, votre offre. I accept it," she answered simply.

"That's all right. You'll be as jolly as a sand-boy there, and if you want a nice little supper as often as ever you like, the kitchen's close by, and I don't give a French man-cook six pounds a week for nothing. What an extravagant rascal he is, to be sure. That fellow would fry his grandmother in the best Epping butter at one-and-sevenpence a pound, if Billy Van Post did not keep a sharp look-out after him."

The bargain, then, was concluded. It suited the Wild Woman in every way. She wanted an oasis in the midst of a desert, a solitude where none but her intimates could hear her, and where she could be as savage and uproarious as she pleased. She was cabined and cribbed in the Little South Lambeth street, with the school-children down stairs, and the Chinese on one side, and the nurse on the other. "*Va pour la chaumière*," she cried, joyously. The Cottage was something wild, something Bohemian, something uncivilised, like herself.

The removal was soon effected. They had no penates. Lily's wardrobe could have been conveyed in a peck measure. The girl was sorry, nevertheless, to leave the little old schoolmaster and his humpbacked niece. Rhodope, indeed, cried very bitterly on the day of the lodger's departure, and, as she wound her arms round Lily, frequently complained that she had now nothing worth living for. It touched Lily to find that there was, after all, some one to like her, although that somebody was crook-backed and troubled with bunions.

Mr. Kafooze was sorry too—very sorry. He said more than once that he did not like the turn affairs were taking, and that some one meant mischief to some one else. The stars told him so. But the celestial bodies, vouchsafing him no further information, he was forced to assume a bland expression of countenance, and to mutter that it was no business of his, and that he had no right to interfere. He kept very carefully out of the way of the Countess, of whom he was honestly afraid, sending for the rent by Rhodope, and requesting his late lodger—in a three-cornered note, beautifully executed in round hand—to do him the extreme favour of returning the latch-key. But he stole a quiet opportunity to bid Lily good-by on the kitchen stairs.

"It isn't a Kathleen Mavourneen farewell, after all," he whispered. "It won't be for years, and it

won't be for ever. The stars tell me so. I shall see you often, my dear, much oftener than you'll see me. You needn't take any notice of me, unless there's something very particular. I'm nobody, but I'm always about. God bless you, and beware of the gentlefolks."

They were speedily installed in the Cottage.

The dwelling placed at the Countess's disposal by Mr. M'Variety might, with almost equal propriety, have been dubbed the Barn, or the Mansion House, or the Log Cabin, for it partook, in pretty well-balanced degrees, of each and every one of the characteristics of the edifices just mentioned. Perhaps when Ranelagh was the country-house of some great seventeenth-century nobleman, it had been a Mansion—indeed, it yet boasted a fine old carved porch, and some latticed windows with deep embrasures of stone, which had a Mansion House look; but it had been half burned down, and patched up again with bricks and boards in a most heterogeneous fashion. What kind of roof it had originally possessed was uncertain. The existing one was certainly of thatch. Its career had been an eminently varied one; and successive lessees of Ranelagh had put it to all kinds of uses. Mrs. Snuffburn, the housekeeper, who had lived through many managements, and whose memory was prodigious, was ready to take her affidavit that she had known the Cottage when it was converted

into a cow-house. Manager Wobbell, who rented the gardens in '36, the Great Balloon year, was of an agricultural turn of mind, and kept pigs in the garden attached to the Cottage. His famous trotting pony, Hydrocephalous, was put out to grass in the adjoining paddock, and in the great hall he kept the Indian corn which he had grown after an approved recipe of the late Mr. Cobbett. The corn came up beautifully; only the rats devoured the greater portion of the crop when it was garnered in, and the residue turned bad, so as to excite, the rather, ridicule than competition when exhibited on a stall in Mark-lane as the Royal Ranelagh Corn.

Monsieur Folliculaire, from Paris, who took the gardens in the Coronation year (you remember: Folliculaire of Tivoli and the Montagnes Russes, who used to give promenade concerts at the Jardin Turc long before Jullien was heard of), "re-mounted," to use his own expression, and redecorated the Cottage in the Louis Quinze style, covering the ceilings with flying personages out of Lemprière's Dictionary, and very scantily attired, and the walls with mirrors, gaseliers, and festooned draperies of pink and white glazed calico. Folliculaire—an imaginative man, but as mad as a March hare—laboured under the delusion that the British aristocracy would flock to the Cottage, which he had rechristened the Trianon Pompadour, there

to hold suppers after the manner of the Regency. There was a confusion of epochs in Folliculaire's mind; but he summed them all up in declaring that he wished to bring back "*le beau siècle poudré*." He did not succeed in resuscitating the powdered century. His endeavours, nevertheless, were commendable. At the clapping of hands, tables laden with the choicest viands and the rarest wines were to rise through trap-doors; you had only to lift a corner of the tablecloth to find the keys of a harpsichord; and the ice-creams were always sent up in shapes representing the *Vénus de Médicis* or the *Belle Chocolatière*. But the machinery of the supper-tables wouldn't work, and the choice viands and rare wines were apt either to stick, in medio, between supper-room and cellar, after the manner of Mahomet's coffin, or else to shoot up suddenly, with alarming crash of crockery-ware, scattering dismay and gravy among the assembled guests. Compelled to have recourse to manual aid in lieu of mechanical appliances, Folliculaire engaged waitresses who wore high powdered toupees, hoops, short skirts, and high-heeled shoes, according to the pattern of the shepherdesses of Watteau and Lancret. These young ladies, however, complained that the high-heeled shoes, in addition to being painful to walk upon, conduced to corns, and that the powder spoilt their hair. Folliculaire suggested wigs; but

the perruques were continually tumbling into plates of lobster salad, and, besides, made the young ladies' heads ache. In despair, he replaced the shepherdesses by a corps of graceful nymphs attired as vivandières of the French army; and, for a while, the blue tunics, white aprons, and scarlet pantaloons, proved very attractive; but, as a rule, the British aristocracy were languid in availing themselves of the delights of the Trianon Pompadour; and the sudden bankruptcy and flight of Folliculaire (he now keeps a coffee-house at Malta) nipped in the bud his ingenious project for converting the Trianon into an Oriental Kiosque, with divans for smokers, and a bevy of houris, dressed like Gulbeyaz in *Don Juan*, to hand chibouques, narghilés, and coffee to the visitors, and execute Bayadère dances in the centre of the saloon.

By turns property-room, scene-shed, firework repository, and general repository for odds and ends, the Cottage had fallen into a curious state of dilapidation. The night watchman lived there at one period. Sundry cocks and hens found out that the deserted rooms were good places to roost in, but they were at length driven out by the rats. At last a legend, which had long lain dormant, was revived, and the Cottage was declared to be haunted. The watchman, who averred that he had seen sights "enuff to make a man's marrer turn to hice," but was otherwise (as is ordinarily the case with ghost-

seers) unable to particularise that which he had seen, removed to other quarters, while people who hadn't seen anything, were, as usual, quite ready to invest the supernatural visitants of the Cottage with a definite form, only they were not unanimous. There was a party for a lady in a white nightgown much bedabbled with blood; there was another (headed by the cook) who placed implicit faith in the nocturnal appearance of a figure with horns and hoofs, who vomited sulphurous flames, and was supposed to be the spectre of a deceased fire-work man, who had sold himself to the Enemy of Mankind; while a by no means uninfluential section, who pinned their faith to the assertions of the chief lamplighter, entertained no doubt whatever as to the periodical issue from the Cottage of two skeleton forms, mounted, one on the shoulders of the other, on a black horse, with eyes of fire. These were at once set down as the phantoms of the dauntless but unfortunate Babylonian Brothers, both of whom contrived to break their necks in a dare-devil ring performance in the reign of Manager Wobbel.

His subordinates thought Mr. M'Variety a very bold man, when, on assuming the lesseeship of Ranelagh, he announced his intention of living in the haunted Cottage. People tried to dissuade him from the idea, but he laughed them to scorn. "Just the very thing I've been trying for all my life," he

remarked, in answer to their expostulations. "Only show me a downright bonâ fide ghost," he said, "and if it's a he, or if it's a she, I'll sign a three years' engagement with that ghost at ten, fifteen, and twenty pounds a week. What stunning double-crown posters we would have out about it to be sure. Eh, Billy Van Post? 'The Ghost at Ranelagh: no augmentation of prices.' It would be tremendous." Mr. M'Variety, it will be remembered, lived prior to the period when every manager throughout the empire could have his ghost by application to Professor Pepper.

Mr. M'Variety, however, did not find it possible to add a "downright bonâ fide ghost" to the attractions of Ranelagh. His only nocturnal visitors were rats, and they, yielding to a judicious course of arsenical treatment, speedily left the Cottage in the prosaic phase of being rather an old-fashioned place, slightly rickety, and not very weather-tight. The manager, who had an eccentric fancy for occupying at least half a score of residences at the same time—his enemies ascribed to him as a motive for thus multiplying his domicile a desire to "dodge" the sheriffs of different counties who might possibly have judgments against him—took a fancy into his head that the Cottage would be a snug little retreat, a convenient pied-à-terre, when he was detained late in town, and a pleasant change for him when he was tired of his villa at Isleworth, his

family residence in Brompton, his big house near Dorset-square, his chambers in Lyons Inn, and a queer little place, half office, half dwelling-house, he occupied in a triangular yard, beginning with a soap-boiler's and ending with a livery-stable, but dignified with the name of a square, and called after some saint, which he occupied in the wilds of Finsbury, somewhere between London-wall and Bishopsgate. A mutable life had Mr. M'Variety lived, and many ups and downs had he seen ; but he always contrived to fall on his feet, somehow ; was never without a diamond ring, and a big one, too ; and drank champagne six days out of seven.

He soon grew tired of the Cottage, however, and said that it gave him the blues. He christened it the "Dismal Swamp." He was, perhaps, disappointed at finding no ghosts about the premises. After a few weeks, he ceased to reside there, and abandoned it to the occupation of the celebrated Albino Family, from the Valley of Dappes. The Albino Patriarch, his wife, and four children, all with fuzzy heads of hair, like spun glass, all with pink eyes, violet gums, teeth of a pale mauve, and ass's milk complexions, lived here for a while. They were very quarrelsome, and from black eyes and contused noses distributed among them by the Patriarch (who drank), were frequently rendered unfit for exhibition. After this they returned

to the Valley of Dappes, where the youngest Albino girl, being alone on the top of a high mountain tending goats, was fortunate enough, in an ecstatic vision, to have an interview with Saint Teresa of Lima, who informed her that the Valley of Dappes was going to the devil, through the deplorable addictedness of the population to drinking hard cider and reading the *Siècle* newspaper on the Sabbath-day. She forthwith became a miracle; the clergy took her up; Monseigneur the Bishop absolutely condescended to issue a mandement about her, gently hinting that people who didn't believe in miracles in general, and St. Teresa of Lima in particular, were babes of perdition, and candidates for perpetual brimstone; and the whole family did much better than when they were at Ranelagh, the pink-eyed Patriarch drinking more freely than ever.

After their departure, and a brief interregnum, during which nobody to speak of, save a mouldy man in a snuff-coloured coat, a Scotch cap, and a red worsted comforter, the fringes of which he used as a pocket-handkerchief, who had his dinner (generally consisting of tripe, liver, or some other visceral matter) sent him daily in a basin, drank cold coffee out of a black bottle labelled "*rue gin*," read with great persistency a pamphlet containing a report of the murder of Lord William Russell by Benjamin Courvoisier, and was stated to be in

the employ of the Sheriff of Surrey—after the transitory occupation of the Cottage by this personage, another family were billeted there by the hospitable Mr. M'Variety. These were the Ouli Zoug Zoug Arabs from Mecca. There was a grandfather, who was a sheikh, and wore a green turban, but was one night recognised by a stray tourist as having been head shampooer at a bath in Cairo. The same tourist declared that the sheikh's eldest son had frequently attended on him in the capacity of a donkey-boy at Alexandria; that the sheikh himself, in the intervals of shampooing, was in the habit of relating improper stories, receiving payment in copper for the same, that the mother and her two daughters had belonged to the honourable fraternity of Almé, and that one particular houri, with the biggest black eyes ever seen out of a sloe-bush, whose vocation it was to sit cross-legged, in very baggy trousers, on a divan, and smoke a hubble-bubble, was an Algerian Jewess, who had formerly kept a little shop for the sale of sham sequins, and attar of roses even more spurious, in Marseilles. Be it as it may, the Ouli Zoug Zoug Arabs from Mecca were, for a time, very instrumental in filling Mr. M'Variety's treasury. It was a great sight to see the sheikh, with his very big green turban, and his very long white beard, strumming on a species of banjo—the Arab mandolin, I presume—while the

Jewess smoked her narghilé, and the daughters danced the shawl-dance, kicking off their yellow slippers, and letting down their back hair in the most exciting passages, while the old woman, who had a pair of moustaches which would have done honour to a grenadier of the Old Guard, handed coffee round to the visitors at a shilling a cup; and the son, who had been a donkey-boy, executed complicated sarabands and back somersaults, uttering, meanwhile, the cries of his native country. The family were strict Mahomedans, and when they ate butchers' meat, which was seldom, a sheep was purchased for them, which they killed on the premises. You paid sixpence extra to see the sheikh grovelling on his prayer carpet: and the ladies never appeared in the promenade in the gardens after the performance without being strictly veiled. It was ultimately, however, unfortunately discovered that even the tourist was wrong in his shampooing theory, and that the sheikh was an Irishman, who had been discharged, not honourably, from the service of the Honourable East India Company. A newspaper exposure put an end to the performances of the Ouli Zoug Zoug Arabs. They essayed to work the provinces, first as Dancing Dervishes, and next as Maronite Christians fleeing from the cruel persecution of the Turkish government; but were at last obliged to retire to Mecca, or Ireland, or obscurity.

CHAPTER X.

PRESENTIMENT.

AND now the Cottage was occupied by Madame Ernestine, as the direct heir and next of kin, in a professional line, of the Ouli Zoug Zoug Arabs, stars of the East, whose light had waned and flickered and gone out, like many other lights of the other days of Ranelagh. But Madame Ernestine's star, at this moment, seemed to be in the ascendant, and Mr. M'Variety had paid full homage to her importance by furnishing the Cottage with many elegant articles which he had not vouchsafed to former occupants. He had fitted up the largest apartment as a drawing-room, and flattered himself that he had done the thing in first-rate style. It is true that the carpet did not cover the whole of the room; but it was a bright red one, of a large

pattern, with a fringe all round, and was thus a little suggestive of Indian splendour. The curtains of the windows were somewhat dingy and faded; but being lined with new pink calico, and tied up with yellow cord, with depending tassels of the pattern which we see in portraits of military heroes, taken with a background of pillar and curtained sky, were indicative, particularly from the outside, of dainty elegance, combined with magnificence. Mr. M'Variety had aimed at splendour rather than comfort, and, with this view, had introduced a great deal of lacquered brass and gilding into the apartment. There were heavy gilt cornices over the windows; an ormolu clock, with an obstinate partiality for half-past four, on the mantelshelf; two or three rickety inlaid tables, with brass rosettes on their hips, and brass claws at the extremities of their legs; a tremendous ormolu chandelier, designed on a scale adapted to halls of dazzling light, and consequently altogether out of proportion to its present sphere, and a dozen or so of white and gold chairs, which had evidently, at one time or other, formed a portion of the costly furniture in the grand salon of a stage marquis. All this would doubtless have been very magnificent had not the effect been slightly marred by traces of the Albino Family and the Ouli Zoug Zougs on the walls and ceiling. Those traces consisted of stains and splashes upon

the dingy paper, as if the Patriarch had been in the habit of throwing his heeltaps in the faces of the members of his amiable family, and missing his mark; and of dark smudges upon the ceiling, dimly suggesting that the Zoug Zougs had used the apartment as a dormitory, and been accustomed to go upon nocturnal hunting expeditions with a tallow candle. It was suggested by a certain person, that in order to have all things in keeping, it would be as well to treat the walls to a new paper, and the ceiling to a pail of whitewash, but Mr. M'Variety would not hear of such a thing. "Never mind paper and whitewash," he said; "with all this gold about, and that magnificent chandelier, which cost a hundred pounds when new if it cost a penny, the room will look first-rate at night. When Madame sits in one of those gilded chairs with her feet upon the back of that gilded stool, she'll think she is a countess in downright earnest."

Two of the smaller apartments had been fitted up as bedrooms, one for Madame Ernestine and the other for Lily. The appointments of these rooms were in much better taste than those of the drawing-room. Lily's little dormitory was exceedingly neat and dainty. It was furnished all in white—a white carpet with a small blue forget-me-not running through it, white dimity curtains to the little bed, and a white muslin covering on

the toilet-table, on which stood an oval looking-glass in a white enamelled frame, wreathed about with lace. Madame's room was furnished with equal comfort and elegance, but more gaudily, and not in white.

Mr. M'Variety flattered himself that the Countess would be charmed with her new abode, particularly after her residence in the humble salons of Mr. Kafooze. When he heard that she was coming over to take possession, he stationed himself in the carved porch to bid her welcome, and perhaps also to give himself the gratification of witnessing her delight and surprise. The Countess did not make her appearance at the exact moment she was expected—she never did—but she came at length, wrapped in an elegant sealskin cloak, poor Lily following at her heels, carrying a bandbox. The Countess was magnificently dressed, and, through the softening medium of her veil, looked almost beautiful. She was in a passion as usual, and came up muttering something about *cette vieille ganache de Kafooze*.

"What's the matter now?" said Mr. M'Variety; "had any words with old Foozlum?"

"Old Foozlum, as you call him," said the Countess, "is an owl, a toad, a bat, un oiseau de mauvais augure. Because I forgot the little riding-whip that Milord Carlton presented to me, and went back for it, he muttered something

about his accursed stars, and said I should have no luck."

"But *you* don't believe in such nonsense?" said Mr. M'Variety, laughing.

"Believe! Bah! I believe in nothing," said the Countess. "But it vexes me. Why should I have no luck? Dites-moi."

"Old Foozlum is wrong for once, Countess," said Mr. M'Variety, "for luck's in your way. What do you think of this for a residence? Will it suit, eh?"

The Countess surveyed the Cottage for a moment with a look of supreme contempt. "So," she said, "this is my castle! Un beau château, vraiment! A palace fit for a queen! Fit for a cow, fit for a pig, fit for any animal that Monsieur M'Variety may have reasons for accommodating with a residence in the Gardens of Ranelagh."

"Now don't say anything disparaging of the Cottage until you have seen the inside of it," said Mr. M'Variety. "Come up-stairs, and I'll show you the drawing-room. But stay, one moment; look at the porch first—a real bit of antiquity, and no mistake." And Mr. M'Variety proceeded to point out the carvings, and expatiate upon their merits as relics of antiquity and works of art.

The Countess stamped her foot impatiently. "Allons, monsieur, entrons!" she said, "I don't like the porch. I don't admire it at all; it is cold

and damp, like a dungeon. *Ma parole d'honneur*, it gives me the horrors !”

“Oh, very well ; come in and see the drawing-room, you'll like that better.” And the manager led the way.

The Countess, jerking an impatient gesture to Lily, immediately followed him ; but she had no sooner crossed the threshold than she paused, and violently grasped M'Variety's arm.

“What's the matter ?” said the manager.

“Something, I know not what,” said the Countess ; “a sudden chill ;” and she shuddered and turned pale as she spoke.

“Come to the fire and warm yourself,” said the manager ; “it is a bitter cold day.”

The Countess did not reply immediately. She stood as if transfixed by some sudden thought. At length she said :

“I do not like this place. I shall not be happy here ; it chills the marrow in my bones. What did the old fool say ? That I should have no luck.”

“Who,” said Mr. M'Variety, “who'd have thought of you being superstitious !”

“I am not superstitious,” she replied. “I am cold ; give me some cognac.”

“Ah, that's what you want,” said the manager ; “sit down a minute by the fire in Mrs. Snuffburn's room, and I'll bring over a bottle.”

Mrs. Snuffburn, a thin, gaunt, ghostly woman, very deaf, with red eyes and a shrill voice, was at the door of her apartment—which was the kitchen—awaiting the arrival of her new mistress. She stood in the doorway, stiff and solemn, like a beckoning spectre. The Countess, though faint and ill, could not help commenting in her usual flattering manner upon the housekeeper's appearance. "Ah, quelle horrible vieille!" she exclaimed. "C'est une sorcière!"

Mrs. Snuffburn being innocent of the slightest acquaintance with foreign tongues, probably took this as a compliment, for she immediately handed the Countess a chair, and said, in as kindly a voice as she could command:

"Sit 'e down, ma'am, do, and warm yourself, for you look mortal cold, to be sure."

The Countess sat down before the fire, put her foot upon the fender, and rested her head upon her hand. Lily had never seen her so dejected, so softened. She put down the bandbox, and quietly approached her chair.

In a timid, faltering voice, Lily said, "Can I do anything for you, ma—madame?"

The Countess, without moving or turning round, took the girl by the hand, and drew her towards her. Poor Lily was startled and half alarmed, for the woman grasped her hand fiercely, though with something of tenderness. But the next in-

stant, when Mr. M'Variety came bustling in with the cognac, she flung the little hand from her and pushed Lily away. "Quick," she said, holding out her hand for the glass, "or I shall do something that will make me ashamed of myself."

What was there that she, Valérie à la Beugleuse, the stable-girl of Marouille; she, the wife of Griffin Blunt, the roué, the sharper, and the debauchee; she, the sham countess and heartless adventuress, the Wild Woman of Ventimillioni's show, Madame Ernestine, the brandy-drinking exponent of the haute-école in the circus at Ranelagh—what was it that she would be ashamed of?

Was it the weakness of allowing one spark of human womanly feeling to glow for one moment at her heart of ice; the crime of permitting that heart to melt to the extent of a single tear? It may have been. She drank off three glasses of brandy one after the other, as they were handed to her by her obsequious manager. Then rose, stood erect, and with a wave of her hand cast her thoughts and her feelings away from her, as one would cast a pebble into the sea. "C'est fini," she said; "I am better now. Let us go and view the château."

M'Variety seemed to be quite relieved when the Countess recovered her ordinary humour; for the mood into which she had been sinking perplexed and troubled him. He was troubled as he would

have been if a performing horse of his, noted for kicking and throwing his rider, had suddenly shown a disposition to be docile and steady.

The manager led the way to the drawing-room, and the Countess followed briskly, singing a snatch of a gay reckless French song.

"What do you say, Countess, is this your style?" he said, as he threw open the door of the gilded apartment. The proprietor of ten thousand extra lamps had not miscalculated the effect of the gilding and the brass cornices and the ormolu chandelier. The Countess was delighted.

"C'est magnifique, c'est charmant!" she said. "Monsieur M'Variety, you are the prince of managers, and be assured that the disinterestedness of your regard for me has my highest consideration. You are a pattern to your profession, mon bon enfant, and I hope, when you die, you will be stuffed and put into a museum as an encouragement to managers. Ah! I see your honest face mantle with gratification at the doing of a good deed; but, ma foi, I have known managers who, if they had caught themselves performing a virtuous action, would have said their prayers for once in their lives, and asked to be forgiven. But you—vous êtes la perle des entrepreneurs."

"Thank you, Countess. I'm very much obliged to you," said Mr. M'Variety, with a knowing look; "I'm glad you appreciate what I have done for

you; for you see I've got the Cottage up regardless of expense. Come and see the bedrooms. This one's for you; a snug crib, ain't it? light, comfortable, and airy, with elegance into the bargain."

"Charmante! charmante!" The Countess was pleased, or feigned to be pleased, with everything.

"And this little one," said Mr. M'Variety, leading the way into the dainty white chamber, "is for missy."

"For missy!" said the Countess. "Pourquoi? Because it is all in white? Why not for me? White is the emblem of purity, is it not? Why not for me then, monsieur? Ha!" And she grinned that horrible grin of hers.

"Oh, well," said the manager, "if you like this one best, you can have it. Please yourself, Countess, but I thought you would prefer the large one."

"Monsieur Mac," said the Countess, tapping the manager on the arm with her riding-whip, "you did not think anything of the kind. I am not a fool, Monsieur Mac; but no matter, the imp shall have this dainty room; the little devil shall be rolled in snow. She shall be my guardian angel." And she leered at the manager knowingly as she spoke.

Mr. M'Variety had seen a good many theatrical mothers and guardians in his time; he knew how heartless, how ruthless, how rapacious they were;

but he had never known one to equal this terrible Frenchwoman. He was very glad to escape from her to the bustle of his managerial duties, in which he was accustomed to forget many things in connexion with his profession which it was not pleasant to dwell upon and think about.

When he had gone, the Countess called for Lily. The girl entered the room timidly and doubtfully.

"Come forward, child," said the Countess; "nearer, close to me. There. Listen. I am your mother. Do you hear that?"

Lily answered with a faint "Yes."

"Your father," continued the Countess, "was a scoundrel, a cheat, a beggar. He deceived me, beat me like a dog, degraded me, and at last left me to the mercy of the world. He died as he had lived—a beggar—and yet he left me a legacy. Do you know what that legacy was?"

The Countess repeated the question fiercely, and Lily answered falteringly, "No."

"Then I will tell you," said the Countess. "*You* were that legacy. Do you understand? No? Then you shall. I am your mother, you are my daughter. It is the duty of a daughter to obey her mother in all things. You shall obey me in all things. Do you hear?"

Lily stood before her mother, trembling and with downcast eyes, and answered, "I hear."

CHAPTER XI.

STILL IN LUCK'S WAY.

LILY scarcely knew what to make of the new humour of her tyrant. The woman's avowal that she was her mother, and her claim upon her for a daughter's obedience, came upon the poor girl so suddenly and unexpectedly, that she was quite dazed and stupified by the vague conflicting thoughts which chased each other through her brain, leaving no fixed or definite impression behind. Why had she so long forbidden Lily to regard her as her mother—dared her to call her by that name? Why did she make the avowal now, and claim, on the score of filial duty, that obedience which she had hitherto enforced by the terror of dreadful words and savage threats? What did she mean by speaking so savagely, and

with so much significant emphasis, of Lily as her "legacy"? And then those terrible words about her father! As Lily sat in her mother's dressing-room at the circus, trying to beguile the time with some purposeless piece of embroidery, these distracting thoughts crowded upon her palpitating brain, and filled her trembling soul with a nameless terror.

She had had an impulse once or twice during the afternoon to throw herself into her mother's arms, and ask to be allowed to love her; but each time when she was on the point of doing so, she was repelled by a cold look or a harsh word. Poor Lily's lonely heart so yearned for something to love, so longed for some one to return the affection which welled over and ran to waste in her own desolate breast, that she could have loved even this cold, remorseless woman. Many and many a time when she was *Quite Alone*, in her little bed at the Pension Marcassin, she had tried to realise to herself what it was to have a papa and a mamma. The other girls talked about their papas and mammas, and bragged about them: how rich their papas were, how beautiful their mammas were, what treats their papas and mammas gave them when they went home for the holidays.

But Lily had no papa; none, at least, whom she knew; no mamma, except the harsh cruel woman who had brought her there, and left her among

strangers, without a kiss or a kind word. And she was at times even doubtful about this woman, who showed none of a mother's feelings, nothing of a mother's love. Marygold had told her the story of the babes in the wood, and of the cruel uncle who deserted them and left them to die in the pathless forest. Perhaps this woman, who chided her, and railed at her, and dragged her along so furiously, was a cruel aunt, who sought to lose her, and leave her to die in that strange city. And at such times, with such sad thoughts throbbing in her bewildered brain, the lonely child would hide her head under the bedclothes, and shed bitter tears. She had been often told that she was bad and obstinate and wicked. And though she did not feel herself a bad wicked girl, and tried to be good, she came to believe that what the woman and Madame Marcassin said of her must be true, and that it was because she was a bad wicked girl that she had no papa and mamma like the other girls. Many a night, long after her companions had gone to sleep, she lay awake, repeating her prayers over and over again, asking God to make her good and give her a kind papa and mamma; and, wearied out at last, she would fall into a pleasant slumber, and dream of the few kind faces that she had seen and known, and hear again the few voices that had spoken to her gently and kindly.

But now she had awakened from all her dreams and all her hopes. Her father, she had just been told, was a cheat, a scoundrel, and a beggar; and her mother was the unloving cold-hearted fury, who was at that moment performing for the amusement of a gaping crowd in the circus at Ranelagh. Poor Lily had but one refuge from the dark despair of the situation in which she found herself, and that was in thoughts of Edgar. They had met once again. He had seen her, and in that one moment, before she fainted, Lily saw that he recognised her. She fondly fancied that the sudden flush that came over his face betokened pleasure, and her yearning heart beat with a trembling joy at the thought. But sadness fell upon her again when she reflected that she was the daughter of a circus-rider, and he a rich high-born gentleman. Oh, if she were only a fine lady, and his equal!

Lily was startled from these distracting reflections by a gentle knock at the dressing-room door.

"Who is there?" she asked.

The door was opened gently, and a voice in the passage said, timidly, "It's only me, my dear."

It was the voice of the stars.

"Come in, Mr. Kafooze," said Lily; "there is no one here but me. I am Quite Alone."

"Yes, my dear," said the astrologer, "I knew that you were by yourself. I wouldn't have ventured if your ma—if Madame Ernestine—had

been here. I don't think she likes me, my dear. I—I said something to her to-day, you know, when she came back for the whip. It's very unlucky to go back for things that way, my dear, and I couldn't help saying it. She's a very extraordinary woman, your ma. I—I really thought she would have horsewhipped me."

"Won't you come in, Mr. Kafooze, and sit down a little?" said Lily, for the astrologer was still lingering in the passage.

"No, my dear, thank you," said Mr. Kafooze; "Madame will be off in a few minutes, and I shouldn't like to fall in her way. I am afraid, my dear, she hasn't a very good temper. Some people can't help it; it's all owing to their stars, and folks can't help their stars, you know."


"Did you want to say anything particular to me, Mr. Kafooze?" Lily asked.

"Yes, my dear, just one word. You said you didn't know what star your mother was born under?"


"No, I don't know at all, Mr. Kafooze, or I should be very happy to tell you."

"I'm sure you would, my dear, I'm sure you would," said Mr. Kafooze. "It's a pity you don't know, though, for I might be able to tell you something about the future."

"Can you read the future, and tell what's going to happen, then?" Lily asked.



“Yes, my dear; I’ve been very correct on many occasions, I assure you. I make all the calculations for a prophetic almanack that sells by hundreds of thousands; but I never get the credit of it, nor the profit of it either. Poor broken-down folks like me never do. People laugh and say the things are put down at random, just what comes first; but they don’t know anything about it. I can assure you, my dear, that when the almanack’s in hand—and one is no sooner off than another comes on—I sit up night after night with the stars, and watch them, and read them, until they go out in the dawn. And you should see the quires and quires of paper that I cover with figures. It costs me something for paper, I can tell you, and if it wasn’t for the backs of Mr. M’Variety’s letters and the old copy-books, I’m sure I don’t know what I should do. Ah, it’s hard work reading the stars, when you read them in earnest as I do. And there’s no doing anything with them unless you study them well. I’ve got a list of my predictions fulfilled, if you would like to look at them. Here’s what I predicted in my almanack for 1845: ‘February, Mars is in Taurus, so that this month there will be wars and rumours of wars, and rebellions,’ which you will see, my dear, by the Morning Advertiser of the 16th of February of the following year, was borne out to the letter. Here’s the paragraph. It says: ‘Yesterday the usually quiet



little town of Croydon was the scene of great disturbance, owing to a quarrel among the navvies engaged on the railway. The navvies fought for some time with stones and sticks, and several of them were severely wounded. The tumult, however, was speedily put down by the police.' And here's another very remarkable one. For the 16th of March I said: 'The opposition of Saturn to Mars denotes the death of a great warrior.' And, sure enough, on the 16th of April of the following year, the Times announced the death of Lieutenant-Colonel Bolderby, of the Somersetshire militia. One of my predictions was fulfilled to the very day. The aspect of Neptune, my dear, enabled me to predict that there would be disaster at sea on the 13th of September, and on that very day, at one o'clock, a boy was drowned while out bathing at Southend. Ah, the stars never deceive you when you study them well. Do you know what star you were born under, my dear?"

"No, Mr. Kafooze," Lily said; "I have not the least idea."

"I should like to know very much," said Mr. Kafooze; "and also your ma's. I think your ma's star must have been Saturn. I don't say it with any disrespect to your ma, my dear, but Saturn is a bad star to be born under. The ancients said that he ate his children."

It flitted across Lily's mind that her ma's star was most probably Saturn.

"You can't tell me the date of your birth, can you?" Mr. Kafooze asked.

"I don't think I can, exactly, Mr. Kafooze," Lily answered. "I used to have a birthday, but it was long ago at school. I think in was in November—the last day of November."

"And how old are you now, my dear?"

"It may seem a strange thing to say, Mr. Kafooze," Lily answered, "but I don't exactly know. I—I think I am nineteen."

"Nineteen!" said Mr. Kafooze, "and the last day of November. Let me see, that will take us back to the year——But, bless me, there's your ma just come off, and I wouldn't have her catch me here for the world. Good-by, my dear, for the present. You'll see me again soon, when I may have something to tell you about the future."

And Mr. Kafooze closed the door, and shuffled away in the dark to get out of the Countess's way. Poor soul! he was thoroughly in earnest about his stars, and really worked hard at that almanack which brought its proprietor and publisher many hundreds a year, but yielded old Kafooze only a few miserable pounds. Yet, if it had yielded him nothing, he would have taken the same pains, for he loved his work, and believed in it. And this

was how the poor old man never could earn more than his two pounds ten a week: he trusted in man, and believed in the stars.

Madame Ernestine came off from her exposition of the high school of horsemanship in great good humour. She was quite radiant with satisfaction. M'Variety had brought to her more good news.

"I am going to give you a benefit, Countess, on the last night of the season."

The Countess was not overjoyed at first, for she had had some experience of benefits. There were benefits and no benefits. M'Variety interpreted her dubious look at once, and hastened to assure her.

"Oh, don't be afraid; it's not that sort; the real thing, bonâ fide, fair share of the receipts, and no expenses. Come to my room after your performance, and I'll tell you all about it."

It was very necessary for Mr. M'Variety to inform the Countess that it was not "that sort." "That sort" was a benefit which M'Variety compelled all his people to take. It was written down in the bond: so much a week and a benefit. But why should compulsion ever be necessary in such a case? Who ever heard of a person refusing to take money when it is honestly offered to him, and he has nothing to do but hold out his hand for it? Well, the fact is, the benefits which Mr. M'Variety so liberally insisted upon all his

people taking, were not benefits for them, but for himself. It was an understood thing that each member of the staff should allow his name to be advertised for a benefit, and that the nominal beneficiare should use all his influence to secure a good attendance.

Beyond that, he had no interest in it. The manager took the money. The outside public would probably regard a transaction of this kind as mean and shabby; but the idea of its being anything but a matter of course never entered Mr. M'Variety's head, or even the heads of his company. It was a usage of the profession, sanctified by time and custom. It is wonderful how such usages permeate the so-called profession to its topmost branches and its deepest roots. In the theatrical body politic everybody gets something out of somebody else by some quiet sub rosa arrangement which never appears aboveboard. You have seen poor wretched broken-down men in the streets carrying advertisement boards, sandwich fashion. Sharp misery has worn them to the bone; their clothes are mere shreds of dirty rags; hunger is in their looks, palsy is in their limbs. They crawl along with bent bodies and downcast eyes, as if they were seeking some spot whereon to lie down and die, some out-of-the-way dust-heap on which to shoot their mortal rubbish. You doubt if such poor, dilapidated, degraded

tenements can possibly lodge immortal souls. Yet even these burlesques of humanity are victims to the pervading usage, which begins with the leading tragedian and the prima donna. They are down in the manager's books for a shilling a day; but there is a middle man who takes the contract, and gives them ninepence.

When Madame Ernestine dismounted from her trained steed *Constant*, she hastened to the manager's room.

"Now, Monsieur M'Variety, about this benefit; dites-moi, I am dying to know."

"Well, Countess, I mean to do the thing that's handsome."

"Half the receipts of the circus, eh?"

"Would you call that handsome?" Mr. M'Variety asked; "the circus will hold fifty pounds; the half of that is twenty-five."

"It is nothing, a bagatelle; but it is much for you—for a manager to give without being asked."

Madame Ernestine had not a high opinion of managers; she believed that even their virtues leaned to vice's side.

"What would you think, then," said M'Variety, with a sly twinkle in his eye, "if I were to give you the whole receipts of the circus?"

"What should I think? I should think, Monsieur Mac, that you were un bon enfant, the prince

of managers, one who is all heart—un ange—and something besides.”

She paused, and added the last words slowly and significantly.

“And what besides?” the manager asked.

“Why, Monsieur Mac, I should think besides all this that you had your reasons. Ha!”

“Well, well,” said Mr. M’Variety, waving off his little attempt to assume the character of a generous benefactor, “that’s nothing to you, you know. You shall have the benefit, and, if you make good use of your swell friends, I don’t see why you shouldn’t net a hundred pounds by it.”

“A hundred pounds! Ah! that is something!” cried the Countess; and her eyes glistened, as if she had seen the money lying before her in bright golden sovereigns.

“And mind,” said M’Variety, “I shan’t charge you a farthing for expenses.”

The manager made a merit of this, and the Countess was good enough to recognise it.

“Believe me, Monsieur Mac,” she said, “I appreciate your generosity; you will, on this occasion, kindly refrain from helping yourself to a share of that which does not belong to you. That is a merit in a directeur, and I give you credit for it. I could embrace you.”

M’Variety was grateful for this reciprocation of

good feeling, but he was a little alarmed at the hint of an embrace. He would as soon have been embraced by a boa-constrictor or a Bengal tiger.

"Well, then," he said, "consider everything arranged."

"Fort bien," said the Countess; "and the day?"

"This day week," said the manager; "the last night of the season—Friday."

CHAPTER XII.

THE LITTLE BIRD.

No woman, however amiable her disposition, or however loving her nature, could have entertained a sentiment of affection for Mr. Francis Blunt, once she came to know him and fathom the depths of his base and worthless character. Francis Blunt married Mademoiselle Valérie, a gay, heartless, unscrupulous, pleasure-loving actress of the Paris theatres. Estrangement and separation were inevitable. Blunt, like many other vain fools, had an ambition to marry an actress, and he married one. Mademoiselle Valérie had an ambition to marry a rich English milord who could keep her in luxury and splendour, and she married the man who seemed to fulfil her desires. But both were deceived. Sitting in his box and gazing

at her in her paint and smiles on the stage, Blunt thought Valérie an angel. Sitting by his own fireside, linked to her by the bonds of holy matrimony—save the mark!—and gazing at her without her paint and her smiles, he found her a devil. Meeting Blunt behind the scenes and at gay supper-parties, where he spent his money like water, and was lionised and addressed as milord, Valérie regarded the Englishman as a person of boundless wealth. Living with him in the same house, knowing all his concerns, encountering all his duns, and witnessing all the mean shifts to which he was occasionally driven, she speedily learned the bitter, and to her maddening truth, that she had married a spendthrift, a roué, an adventurer, a beggar.

To Blunt, the discovery that his wife was a selfish, cold-hearted, unbearable woman, was a surprise and a disappointment; but nothing more. He was not squeamish; moral scruples never troubled him; he was perfectly indifferent to the opinion of the world. He could separate from her, give her a maintenance—or promise her one—and return to his old, gay, reckless life.

But Valérie's position was different. Had she been the best woman that ever breathed, she could not have smothered her contempt for the heartless coxcomb who had so bitterly deceived her, and afterwards so cruelly used her. But Valérie was

not a good woman; she was a female harpy, whose whole aim and ambition was to be richly dressed, to have plenty of money, and to live in a constant round of pleasures. Such being her character, she did not merely despise Blunt, she hated him with all the fierceness and malignity of a fiend. And her loathing hatred of him culminated and came to its darkest and worst just at the time when a true woman's nature becomes most softened, most tender, most capable of trust and love and forgiveness.

The time of her fiercest and most implacable hatred of her husband was when she first heard the cry of her new-born babe. It should have been a new bond of union. It was the cause of irremediable and implacable hate. This sham milord—this copper-gilt calf before whose lacquered magnificence she had fallen down—fallen down, not to be lifted up to the coveted pinnacle of splendour and gaiety and pleasure, but to be ruthlessly trodden over, debased, degraded, spurned with the foot of contempt—this man, her husband, had robbed her of the sunshine of her youth, cheated her of her golden opportunity, darkened the high noon of her days, and at length cast her from him, leaving her with the consciousness—to her a hateful one—of being a mother, the mother, too, of *his* child.

This terrible Frenchwoman was impenetrable;

her heart—if she had a heart—was a fortress of implacability. She was so cold, so indurated in her hate, so fierce in her purpose of revenge, that one might have suspected her of being literally possessed by a devil. She hated Lily, the infant, because she was the child of the man who had deceived her, ill used her, and disappointed her of her selfish expectations; she hated Lily, the girl, because, while she promised to be an instrument of vengeance in her hands, she was yet a burden and a trouble to her. If she relented a little towards her now, it was not because of the awakening of any latent spark of maternal feeling in her breast of steel, but because she was making some profit out of the girl, and saw a prospect of making still more. She relented towards her as a brute of a costermonger will relent towards the ass that bears his burden, and earns for him his meat and his drink and his pleasures.

After her interview with Mr. M'Variety, the Countess was quite pleasant to the girl, after a fashion. Lily had never known her speak so kindly before. Poor Lily! She was thankful for very small mercies in the way of kindness. She was grateful for the veriest crumbs. The Countess returned to her dressing-room with a look of triumph in her face, singing a snatch of one of her favourite French songs.

"You perceive, mademoiselle, that I am gay this evening," she said, addressing Lily.

"Yes, ma——" Lily paused at the word, and the Countess took her up short, slapping her riding-habit with her whip.

"'Yes, madam,' you were about to say. I did not tell you that you were to call me mother; but that you were to regard me as such, and obey me as such. I hate the word. You rejoice that I am gay—n'est-ce pas?"

"Yes, I am glad that you are gay," Lily replied.

"Bien," said the Countess, "that is dutiful; and you shall be rewarded; you shall sit up with me to supper in my new château. Quick! Assist me to undress."

This was the kindness for which Lily was so grateful.

The Countess submitted herself to the hands of her fille-de-chambre without indulging in the usual ebullitions of temper, and when she was dressed, insisted upon Lily walking by her side, and talking to her on her way through the gardens to the Cottage.

"We shall live here," she said, "until the commencement of the summer season, as Monsieur le Directeur calls it; and in the mean time I shall teach you to ride. You know nothing, you are

ignorant, useless. I work for my living; why should not you for yours? I work for you now. By-and-by, when I am old and can no longer give an exposition of the haute-école, you will show your gratitude for all I have done for you by working for me. Will you not? Répondez-moi donc!"

"I will do anything you ask me," Lily replied. But she shuddered at the idea of becoming a horse-rider.

"Très bien!" said the Countess, "you are still dutiful, so you shall sup with me. Allons! Entrons!"

There was more good news for the Countess; another pleasant surprise.

A servant had called with a large hamper containing an elegant supper and several bottles of wine. Mrs. Snuffburn was at the foot of the stairs, in a high state of excitement with the intelligence.

"Who was the person who brought this—what you call it—hampaire?" the Countess asked.

"It was brought by a livery-servant, mum," said the housekeeper; "but he didn't leave no message, except that it was for Madame Ernestine."

"Did he not say who sent it?"

"No, mum. I asked him if there was com-

pliments with it, and the young man, which he had top-boots on, mum, and a cockade in his 'at, said as there wasn't no compliments with it, but there was half a dozen bottles of sparkling, which was better, he thought."

The Countess opened the hamper, and her eyes gleamed with pleasure, not so much at the dainties which it contained, as at the thought of her rising fortunes, and the influence which she was once more exercising upon the gay votaries of pleasure.

"No matter," she said; "it is an elegant petit souper, come whence it may, and I am hungry. Let it be laid à l'instant. And that corbeau, that ogre, that ganache, said I should have no luck! Why, it rains luck—rains châteaux, benefits, pheasants, champagne. Ha! what have we here? Cognac. One bottle in the corner! A good thought; vous êtes un bon enfant, monsieur—you understand me—qui que vous soyez."

The supper was laid in the gilded apartment, and the Countess and Lily sat down together. The Countess ate and drank of everything, condescending even to patronise the champagne, but poor Lily could scarcely taste a thing. The Countess's declaration of her intention to make her a horse-rider had completely taken away her appetite, and made her feel sick and faint.

"Eat, child, mais mangez donc?" the Countess said to her, almost fiercely, as she herself gnawed wolfishly at the leg of a pheasant.

"I have no appetite," Lily said, languidly. "I—I do not feel very well."

"No appetite!" cried the Countess. "I understand; no appetite—ha! ha! You will recover from that malady. *Ma foi!* when you come to be my age you will have an appetite."

And she went on eating with her fingers, and gnawing the bones, and almost snarling over them.

"If you cannot eat, perhaps you can drink. There, take some champagne. I will not grudge it you. It cost me nothing."

She poured—or flung rather—the bright bubbling wine into a tumbler and pushed it towards the girl. Lily put the glass to her lips timidly, and sipped at its sparkling contents.

"Drink it up—*videz le verre,*" cried the Countess, angrily. "I have no patience with such mincing pretences. Drink, I say!"

Lily, clutching the glass desperately, drank its contents to the last drop in sheer despair, as she would have drunk poison.

"Now, you may go; *va-t'en*—there is your room. It was intended for me; but I have given it up to you. You see how I love you—what a good mother I am." And she grinned horribly.

Lily was only too glad to obey. She was always

thankful when bedtime came, that she might seek refuge from her sorrows in the forgetfulness of a sound sleep, or in the unrealities of a pleasant dream. She took a little candle that had been placed on the side-table for her, and retired to the dainty white chamber; but she was too weary, too eager to shut her eyes and bury her head, to do more than bestow a languid glance upon its tasteful furniture and neat appointments. She had eaten scarcely anything, and the champagne which her mother had forced her to drink made her heavy and drowsy. She put out her light, and undressed and crept to bed in the dark. She began to say her prayers—she never omitted them, though she might have begun to think that there was no ear in Heaven for her, so often had she repeated them and yet no deliverance—she began her prayers, but, as had often happened before, when she was worn out with her dragging-chain of misery, she lost herself among the words, and fell asleep murmuring them.

How long she had been asleep she knew not, but she was suddenly aroused by a great gleam of light streaming through the crevices of her door. She thought for a moment that the Cottage was on fire, and was about to scream and give the alarm, when she heard her mother's voice. She was singing

Gai, gai, gai,
Vive la gaudriole.

Lily listened, and heard her mother mixing up the names of Milord Carlton, and Sir William Long, and the Marquis Greyfaunt—le Marquis Greyfond, as she called him—in a succession of nonsense verses, with the same gay, reckless chorus. Anon, she broke into another strain—French dithyrambics which need not be repeated. They were about love, and bagatelle, and cognac.

The light seemed to be growing stronger and more intense, as if the room beyond were burning fast. Lily rose from her bed and crept to the door, which she had neglected to close. It stood slightly ajar. She knelt down and looked through the opening.

The Countess, her mother, was sitting in the gilded arm-chair, her feet resting upon the gilt eagle which formed a footstool, holding a glass in her hand, and singing. She had lighted every burner in the great chandelier designed for halls of dazzling light, and, in the midst of the gilding and brass and lacquer and the blaze of gas, trolled forth her reckless French songs. Lily was relieved to find that the house was not on fire, as she at first feared; but she was inexpressibly shocked to see her mother in that dreadful state. Her first impulse was to retire, and once more hide herself under the bedclothes; but she felt herself rooted to the spot as if by a fascination. She remained gazing at the extraordinary scene until the woman rose, and with an unsteady step approached the

door of her chamber. Lily retreated immediately, crept into bed, and feigned to be asleep.

The next instant the Countess entered and approached the bed. She paused for a moment and looked down upon the face of the girl, seemingly wrapped in sleep. Lily felt the light from the chandelier in the other room streaming full and strong upon her closed eyes, and through her eyelashes she could see her mother looking down upon her with a strange wild expression that terrified her—terrified her only for a moment. When the thought suddenly flashed through her brain that the Wild Woman had come to murder her, she resigned herself, and closed her eyes firmly, in anticipation of the stroke that would rid her at once of life and of misery. She was sensible of something approaching close to her, and muttered a prayer. She felt a glow of heat upon her cold brow, and held her breath for the stroke to fall. It fell. It was a fierce, feverish, savage kiss imprinted upon her cheek by her mother—for the first time in the girl's memory.

The Countess seemed to repent of what she had done. The moment she had kissed her daughter, she drew herself up to her full height, her face reddened, her eyes flashed fire, and she smote herself upon the mouth savagely, as if to castigate her lips for the weakness of which they had been guilty.

The Countess retired immediately. Lily watched

her with bated breath, and listened. She saw the lights go out in the gilded chamber; she heard her mother stamping and raging in the bed-chamber adjoining. The chairs, or the chest of drawers, or the towel-horse, or something had offended her. Then all was still. Lily tried to compose herself to sleep; but sleep would not come, she was too much agitated. She thought, as she always did when harassed and perplexed, of Edgar. He was her star in the dark; the pole to which her heart turned like the trembling needle in the compass of the cast-away mariner. The thought passed through her mind once again that if she were only Edgar's equal in position, her misery would cease, and all would be well. Still she could not sleep. She rose, lighted her candle, and tried to read. She could not read. Her attention wandered to anything except the page upon which her eyes were bent—wandered at the end of all to the image of the handsome Edgar Greyfaunt.

Suddenly her glance fell upon the white cover of the toilet-table. Woven into its texture, there was the figure of a bird holding a leaf in its mouth. Looking about, Lily discovered behind the looking-glass a hair-brush, the back and handle of which were ornamented with mother-of-pearl. That also bore the figure of the little bird holding the leaf. She had seen that device before, and remembered it well, yet could not tell where she had seen it, or

when. Why did she puzzle her throbbing brain about so trivial a matter? She could not say why, and yet she did trouble her brain about it. She went back over her whole life in pursuit of that little bird—back to Signor Ventimillioni's show, to Madame de Kergolay's, to the Pension Marcassin, to the Bunnycastle, to the shop of Cutwig and Co.; and she found it not. Now and again she thought she had caught it; but the little bird fluttered away and escaped from her hands. But at last she hunted it into a corner. The little bird had led her to the hotel at Greenwich, where she sat upon Sir William Long's knee and played with his seals, and with the great signet-ring on his finger. It was upon that signet-ring, and upon a certain seal, that she had first seen the image of this little bird with the leaf in its mouth. It was a crest. How did this crest come here?

Lily asked herself the question, and a thought rushed into her brain, bringing back some words long since spoken, some feelings long since faded, like early leaves, and filling her breast with a storm of conflicting thoughts. She looked at the crest again. There was a motto embroidered underneath. It was "*Spes et fortuna.*" *Fortuna*? That must mean fortune; but what was "*Spes*"?

Lily fell to sleep at last, with the word upon her lips, wondering.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOVE AND GRATITUDE.

THE secret which the little bird whispered to Lily perplexed and agitated her very much.

She had noticed the rise in her mother's fortunes, but ascribed it to the popularity of her performances in the circus, and the liberality of Mr. M'Variety, the manager. The little bird told her quite another story. It told her that the dainty white bedroom had been furnished for her by Sir William Long. It was easy to infer from this that the Cottage, the renewed engagement, the increase of her mother's salary, the benefit, and the elegant supper, all came from the same quarter.

For whose sake had the baronet spent so much money, and taken so much trouble? For her mother's? Lily would fain have let her heart answer

this question in the affirmative, but try as she would, she could not impose that conviction upon herself. Something, some still small voice of the past, told her that it was not for her mother's sake that the baronet had done all these things, but for her own.

Lily strove to think that it was done in pity for her hard life and forlorn condition; that it was simply the act of a generous and sympathising nature. But while she struggled to interpret his motives in this wise, her heart was agitated by a suspicion that filled her with a vague feeling of dread.

Could it be possible that Sir William Long loved her?

That was the question which strove to shape itself in her mind. But Lily repressed it, and kept it down, dreading to have to answer it. And this she did to guard the image which sat enthroned in her breast—the image of Edgar Greyfaunt. But the question arose again and again, and shaped itself definitively, and demanded to be answered; and Lily, still hesitating, went back over her weary life to the Greenwich dinner. She had so few remembrances of pleasant days, that she was not likely to forget that day. It arose in her memory sharp and clear, a bright green island in the midst of a great waste of waters. She remembered sitting on Sir William Long's knee; she recalled

the kind things he said to her, and how happy she felt at being near him. If she had never thought of him from that time until this moment, she might have forgotten how he looked, where they sat, what kind things he said to her, and many other little particulars of the occasion. But she had thought of him often, and carried him forward on every new page of the ledger of her life up to the day when she wrote the name of Edgar Greyfaunt upon it. She thought of the tall kind gentleman less frequently after that; but she had thought of him so often before, that his image was indelibly impressed upon her memory. She remembered everything; how he had laughed and chatted with her, and asked her her name, and inquired how old she was. She remembered his peeling the apple and throwing the peel over his shoulder, and saying that it would form the initial of her sweetheart's name; how the peel lay on the carpet in the shape of a W, and how she clapped her hands and said she should like to be his little wife, and make him a pair of nice red muffatees for the winter. And she remembered his stooping down and kissing her on the forehead, and saying, "I heartily wish you were my little sister, or my little daughter." Last of all, she remembered that she was eight years of age then, and he twenty-eight.

So far as Lily knew, she was now in her twentieth year. And Sir William? Sir William was forty!

When Lily had worked out this little sum, and saw the figures staring her in the face, she closed her eyes against them, as if by so doing she could shut out the reflections to which they gave rise.

She went back over her recollections of the Greenwich dinner again, and always when she came to those parting words her heart was relieved : "I heartily wish you were my little sister, or my daughter."


When Madame Ernestine was at the circus rehearsing a new act of the *haute-école* for her benefit, Lily wandered from room to room, thinking, thinking, thinking. Every object upon which her eyes rested was as dreary, and miserable, and forlorn as her own heart. Looking from the windows of the Cottage through the pelting rain, she saw the leafless trees nodding at her like grim spectres ; the weeping ash-trees bare and gaunt, overhanging the seats and tables, appeared to her like huge skeleton hands waiting to crush the votaries of pleasure in their grip. Through the mist and drizzle of the winter's day, the black flower-beds loomed upon her sight like graves, of which the dripping dirt-begrimed statues were the head-stones, sacred to the memory of departed flowers, which seemed to have died without issue. The Muscovite illusion had in part been rudely dispelled by the winter's wind. A portion of the cupolas of the Kremlin had been blown down, and the gap revealed some

stacks of South Lambeth chimneys, smoking dismally, and dropping tears of soot upon the dingy gables.

One day, when Lily was looking out upon this dreary scene, wondering if those trees would ever again be covered with leaves; if those scrubs and stumps in the beds would ever again rise from their sepulchres crowned with the glory of flowers, wondering if her own heart would ever throb to an emotion of joy, she saw the figure of a man looming through the mist, and approaching the Cottage. As the figure came nearer, Lily recognised Mr. Kafooze.

Taking him in his most favourable aspect, Mr. Kafooze was not a cheerful person to look upon. In a pretty picture the most indulgent critic would have regarded him as a blemish. Under the present circumstances, an ordinary observer would have viewed him in the light of an additional horror—a bat that had flitted across the sky, or an owl that had suddenly perched upon a bare and gnarled branch to complete the dismal picture. But to poor Lily the lean wizened figure of the astrologer was a thing of beauty; his coming was an angel's visit; for she knew that he had a feeling heart, and he was one of the very few persons who had ever spoken kindly to her.

The conduct of Mr. Kafooze was mysterious. He approached the Cottage, and disappeared from Lily's sight, leading her to suppose that he was in



the porch knocking for admission; but presently he loomed in sight again, and walked about in front of the Cottage, looking up, and shading his eyes with his hand. Any one but Lily would have characterised Mr. Kafooze's conduct as "prowling;" but Lily soon perceived that he was trying to attract some person's attention. And who could that person be but herself?

She tapped at the window, and beckoned to him to come in; and, assured by this, Mr. Kafooze went round and entered the porch. Lily ran down stairs immediately and opened the door. Mr. Kafooze dry was not precisely an embodiment of happiness; but Mr. Kafooze wet was a monument of misery, which left no further depth to be reached. It would have been hard to give an adequate idea of the wretchedness of his appearance, without calling in the illustrative services of the "drowned rat."

"Oh, do come in, Mr. Kafooze, out of the rain," Lily said.

"No, thank you, my dear," said the astrologer. "I—I won't come in; your ma will be finished presently, and I shouldn't like her to see me here."

"But you will get wet through, Mr. Kafooze," pleaded Lily.

"Oh, never mind, my dear; the wet doesn't hurt me. I'm used to it," said the astrologer.

"I've been used to it all my life. If there's a shower of rain anywhere, I'm sure to be out in it without an umbrella. It's my star, my dear. I was born under a bad aspect of Aquarius, with Scorpio in opposition. Under such circumstances, you're sure to forget your umbrella, even if it wasn't full of holes and three ribs broken. No, never mind, my dear, I only wanted to say a word. I've been looking back, my dear, among my books, with the data you gave me, and I have found your star."

"It's very good of you to take so much trouble," said Lily.

"Oh, not at all, my dear; I like it. I'm never so happy as when I am studying the stars. Well, my dear, if your data be correct, you were born under a very peculiar conjunction. Mars was in Leo, you see, which is bad. I assure you I was very anxious about it at first, until I went a little further, and found that though in Leo at that time, he was passing out of that sign and entering Libra, which is good; if it were not that Uranus was in Cancer. However, my dear, as Jupiter passed the place of the sun a few days afterwards, I think the aspect is a favourable one, signifying that you will get over the evil influence of Mars in Leo. That is all, my dear; and I thought I would just come round and tell you while your ma is at rehearsal."

"It's very kind of you, I'm sure, Mr. Kafooze,"

Lily said ; " but do come in and dry yourself by the fire."

" No, my dear, no ; Madame will be here directly, and I must clear out of her way. Good-by ! Good-by !"

" Stay. One moment, Mr. Kafooze," said Lily, laying her hand upon his arm.

" Yes, my dear."

" You know several languages, don't you, Mr. Kafooze ?"

" Well," he said, " I—I have a smattering of two or three."

" Perhaps, then," faltered Lily, " you can tell me the meaning of—of ' spes.'"

" Yes, my dear," said the schoolmaster ; " it's a Latin word, and it means Hope."

" Hope !" said Lily. " Oh, thank you, Mr. Kafooze, thank you. Good-by ! Good-by !"

It was perhaps lucky for Mr. Kafooze that he did not remain longer talking about his stars, for he had scarcely passed out of the gate before Madame Ernestine emerged from the circus, and came across the gardens accompanied by a posse of male friends. These friends were Lord Carlton, Sir William Long, the Marquis Greyfaunt, Mr. Thomas Tuttleshell, and Mr. M'Variety, the manager. The Countess ushered her friends into her new abode with much ironical courtesy, mingling her mock civilities with maledictions upon the

English weather, and upon everything else English, except the Ship at Greenwich, and the Star and Garter at Richmond.

"We must have a dinner at one or other of those places after the benefit," said Lord Carlton.

"A dinner at Greenwich!" the Countess exclaimed, with sparkling eyes. "Ah, that is what I love. There is nothing in England worth living for but a dinner at Greenwich with those little fishes."

"But the little fishes are not in season yet," said Lord Carlton.

"Pourquoi pas?" said the Countess; "why are not those little fishes always in season?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said his lordship.

"N'importe," said the Countess, "we shall have a dinner at Greenwich after the benefit, shall we not?"

"Certainly," said Lord Carlton.

The Countess rushed up-stairs before her visitors to prepare Lily. She hurried her out of the front room, where she was sitting rapt in thought, into the bedroom.

"Now attend to me," she said; "I will have no faints, no shrieks; you are not a child. I have visitors; Milord Carlton, and Sir William Long, and Monsieur Greyfond. Arrange your hair, and come into the apartment à l'instant."

Lily was quite scared by the sudden pounce

which her mother had made upon her, and her agitation was now further increased by the mention of Edgar's name. He was in the next room, and Sir William Long was there also ! If she had had time to reflect, she would probably have given way to her emotions, as she had done before ; but in sheer desperation she nerved herself to the ordeal, and followed her mother into the reception-room.

Mr. M'Variety was the first to address her.

" Ah, missy, how do you do ? Looking pale, eh ? I expected to see you quite rosy, living in the gardens here, among the trees and the fresh air."

And the manager shook hands with her. Then the rest in succession, ending with the Sultan, who grasped her hand warmly, and was quite gracious. Lily was ready to faint, but she sustained herself, and sat down on an ottoman by the window, the Sultan taking a chair near her, with his face towards her.

While the Countess was rallying her visitors and inviting them to partake of some wine, which she assured them, in a significant manner, was not of the vintage of South Lambeth, the Sultan Greyfaunt condescended to open a conversation with the " little party." He spoke slightly in an under tone.

" I hope I may look upon you as an old friend, mademoiselle," he said, with a smile.

Poor Lily's heart was in her mouth. She knew not what to reply. It was not so much Edgar's words that agitated her (for they were cold and formal enough) as his look and his smile. In Paris his behaviour to her had always been haughty and cold. Now he was gracious, and something more. Lily would have found it difficult to define that something more which his manner implied; but she *felt* it, and the colour mantled to her pale cheeks.

"We were friends in Paris," Edgar pursued, "and I hope we shall be better friends in London."

Lily's heart was beating fast, and her face was becoming crimson. She muttered something in reply, she knew not what, and then her glance fell upon Sir William Long. He was sitting among the Countess's visitors, not joining in their conversation, nor listening to them, nor taking any heed of them, but gazing pensively and thoughtfully, with a touch of dejection in his face, at her—at her and Edgar seated together in the window.

Suddenly the Countess turned round and saw them.

"Ah, Monsieur Greyfond!" she exclaimed, "what are you saying to mamselle there in the corner? Vous êtes un mauvais sujet." And she shook her finger at him with a ghastly assumption of reproof. "Come," she said, "sit by me. I wish to talk to you concerning my benefit."

Edgar moved away from Lily, and sat down beside the Countess.

"Will you not take a box for my benefit?" she said. "All my friends here have taken boxes."

"Yes, and paid for them," said Mr. Thomas Tuttleshell, "like gentlemen." Mr. Thomas Tuttleshell lost no opportunity of talking at his serene highness. He was continually shooting random arrows, in the hope that a stray one might hit the mark and rankle somewhere.

"Oh yes, certainly," said his highness. "And the price? how much?"

"How much?" exclaimed the Countess, in an injured tone. "You ask a lady on the occasion of her benefit, how much?"

Mr. Thomas Tuttleshell chuckled with much inward satisfaction.

"Oh, well, the fact is," said Greyfaunt, "I have very little loose cash about me; but—but I will give you a cheque upon my bankers." And he wrote a cheque for twenty pounds, and handed it to the Countess with the air of a millionaire.

"Vingt livres!" exclaimed the Countess. "Monsieur Greyfond, vous êtes un prince. Give me your hand."

Mr. Thomas Tuttleshell's satisfaction subsided a little. Mr. Edgar Greyfaunt had paid more for his box than any of the others!

"And now, my lord and messieurs," said the Countess, "as you have invited me to dine with

you at Greenwich, I beg you will honour me with your presence at a petit souper in my château here after the performance on Friday. Say, will you do me the honour?"

"Oh, certainly," the visitors said in a breath, as they rose to take their departure; "we shall be most happy."

"Bon," said the Countess, "we shall have a snug little party. We shall be gay."

On taking leave, Edgar shook hands with Lily with the same warmth as before; and he looked at her with the same smile and expression which had made her heart throb and her cheeks flush when he first addressed her.

Sir William Long was the last to go up and bid her good-by.

"Have you quite forgotten your old Greenwich acquaintance?" he said.

"Forgotten you!" said Lily, taking his hand. "I shall ever remember you, ever think of you—with gratitude."

Sir William drove home that afternoon with the cold word sticking in his throat, like something he could not swallow.

"For me gratitude," he muttered to himself, "and for that brainless, heartless puppy, love! Oh Lily, Lily!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAST NIGHT OF THE SEASON.

“RANELAGH ! Last night of the winter season ! Benefit of Madame Ernestine, the world-renowned exponent of the High School of Horsemanship, who will appear on her trained steed Constant, and perform an entirely new act, descriptive of a Buffalo Hunt on the Prairies of the Far West ! Ten thousand extra lamps ! Additional and special attractions for this occasion only ! N.B. Prices as usual.”

Thus the advertising columns of the newspapers ; thus the hoardings and the dead walls ; thus the perambulating sandwiches, with so very little human ham in the middle ; thus countless little handbills that were jerked at the passers-by, glanced at, and thrown to the winter's wind to be

driven against pillars and posts, to be caught in railings and gratings, and eventually to be chased into calm corners, there to lie and give rise in too hopeful breasts to the delirious suspicion of five-pound notes.

The day arrived, and it was fine. The air was clear and crisp, and for the first time for some weeks the sun came out for a little while, pale and sickly, like an invalid taking his first airing after a long illness. Mr. M'Variety assured the Countess that she might rely upon a bumper.

"You see, Countess, in the winter there's nothing like a fine bright day to give the public an appetite for a play or an entertainment. It acts upon them like a bottle of champagne, or a 'picker-up' after a heavy bout the night before. But it's just the contrary in the summer, if the entertainment be an in-door one. Then there's nothing like a shower of rain about five o'clock in the afternoon. A good smart shower, or a gloomy drizzle, will drive them in in flocks, like chickens to roost. Only give me the key of the weather," said the manager, "and I'll make Ranelagh pay in the winter and Drury Lane in the summer."

The Countess was busy with her preparations for the little supper which she was to give to "her friends" after the performance, and did not take much heed of the managerial philosophy. Indeed, she was not much interested; for her friends and

her friends' friends had already taken a large number of tickets at fancy prices, and thus her own share was secured.

But M'Variety had a little matter of business in view, and continued to lead up to it with some general observations on managerial policy. He came at length to the point.

"What about those tickets, Countess?"

The Countess paused in her occupation, and looked up at her manager sharply.

"What about those tickets? What tickets?" she asked.

"The tickets you have sold to your swell friends," said the manager.

"Well, sir, what about them? I do not understand you."

"Our arrangement," said the manager, "was half the receipts of the circus; it was a very liberal one, I think, on my part."

"On *your* part!" The Countess threw back his words with a sneer.

"Come, come, Countess, be reasonable. Admit that I have done my best for you, at any rate. And a bargain's a bargain, you know." Mr. M'Variety was beginning to plead with her. The Countess perceived this, and took advantage of it.

"I understand you," she said; "you expect me to give you half of the sums which I have received from my friends; half of the twenty pounds, for

example, which Monsieur Greyfond presented to me?"

"Exactly," said the manager; "that's only fair."

"Then," said the Countess, sternly, "I shall do no such thing. What is the price of Monsieur Greyfond's box? Tell me that!"

"Two guineas," said the manager.

"Très bien," said the Countess, "you shall have the half; you shall have one guinea."

"Oh, come, Countess, that won't do at all," the manager protested.

"Stay," said the Countess; "tell me this. Monsieur Greyfond gave me twenty pounds for a box which he might have had for two guineas. Was it for your sake that he lavished his money thus?"

M^rVariety was getting nettled.

"Well, if it comes to that, Countess," he said, "was it for yours?"

The Countess had been biting her lip and restraining herself hitherto, but she burst out now.

"Insolent!" she exclaimed; "how dare you come here, into my own house, into my own apartment, to take from me the presents of my friends, to rob me, to insult me with your vulgar words! But, I tell you, I will not submit to your extortion. I will die first."

She flounced about the room with glaring eyes

and clenched hands as she said this; and at length put a climax to her rage by seizing one of the china ornaments on the mantelshelf, and dashing it to atoms against the grate.

M'Variety was sorry he had spoken.

"Look you," continued the Countess; "rather than you shall have any share in my presents, I will take the notes and the cheques and put them into the fire."

The Countess had the best of the position in every way. She had the money in her pocket, and, for the rest, she was utterly indifferent to consequences. The manager was fully aware of this, and refrained from pursuing the subject further.

"I'll bid you good afternoon, Countess," he said, "and talk to you another time, when you are in a better temper."

"A better temper!" she shouted after him, as he descended the stairs; "you would vex the temper of an angel." And she slammed the door upon him savagely.

"If ever the devil had a daughter," said the manager, as he crossed the garden, "yon's she, for a certainty."

Madame Ernestine's temper did not obey the law of ordinary violent disorders. It was at all times sharp; but never short. When she had run up the crescendo scale to the highest note

in the gamut of fury, she went back and repeated the same exercise again and again, with an increase rather than a diminution of brilliant execution. She fumed and stormed all the afternoon, and when she walked across to the circus to begin her performance, the thunder was still rumbling.

As she was entering the circus she met Lord Carlton. She recovered herself immediately, and saluted his lordship gaily.

"Ah, milord, how do you do? You have come to honour me with your presence, I perceive. It is very gracious of you."

"Oh, not at all," his lordship replied; "beauty and talent always command my homage. It would have been impossible for me to stay away on such an occasion."

"Your lordship is most flattering," said the Countess, with a grin. "By the way," she added, "your lordship honoured me with a charming present, this riding-whip."

"A bagatelle," said his lordship.

"Oh, not at all," said the Countess. "I value it very much. I have not used it hitherto; but I shall use it for the first time to-night, on the occasion of my benefit."

"You do me honour," said his lordship.

"You are very kind to say so, milord—but, excusez-moi, it is time that I go and dress. Shall

I have the honour of your lordship's company to supper in my humble château?"

"Certainly," said his lordship; "it will give me great pleasure."

"Then adieu pour le moment," said the Countess; "we shall meet at supper."

She encountered old Kafooze in the passage leading to her dressing-room. She was not so gracious to him.

"Ah! ganache, ogre, corbeau, oiseau de mauvais augure! what did you say?—that I should have no luck?" And she struck at the old man with her whip. Old Kafooze sprang aside with wonderful agility, but did not avoid the blow. The whip caught him a sharp cut across the shoulders, and made him writhe; but he said never a word, and slunk away as fast as he could, putting it all down to Scorpio in that bad conjunction with Aquarius.

Mr. M'Variety proved a true prophet. The fine bright weather brought the people out, and the gardens were well filled, considering that it was the winter season. The visitors, however, were soon tired of promenading among the ten thousand extra lamps, whose brilliancy only tended to make the wretchedness of the gardens more visible, and crushed into the circus in a body the moment the doors were opened. The circle and amphitheatre were speedily filled, and by-and-by Madame

Ernestine's aristocratic friends began to drop into the boxes. Sir William Long was there in a box by himself, looking solemn and thoughtful. Greyfaunt was in the box adjoining, yawning, and looking inexpressibly bored by the performance of the Swiss Shepherdess. Lord Carlton had settled himself to sleep at once. Fainéant was there also, and Mr. Thomas Tibbs, and many more, who came, not for the sake of patronising Madame Ernestine, but to be in the same train with Milord Carlton and Sir William Long.

The blank, listless countenances of these superior persons, satiated with a constant round of pleasure, presented a remarkable contrast to the bright happy expectant faces that glistened under the lamps in the amphitheatre. In the eyes of those humble folks, who had worked hard for the shillings they had paid at the doors, everything was delightful, beautiful, charming. The Shepherdess in her flowered muslin skirt, with her crook, dancing and skipping upon the padded saddle, hailed by Mr. Edgar Greyfaunt as a "scraggy fright," was to them an aerial creature belonging to another sphere; the Three Graces were real divinities in petticoats, exciting the admiration of the male sex by the exquisite shape of their legs, and the pinkiness of their complexions; and of the female sex—especially those of a domestic turn, who did their washing at home—by

the perfection exhibited in the clear-starching of their petticoats; Young Strangler hitching at mysterious strings, and skinning himself like a Protean onion, was a prodigy of daring and genius; the clowns with their old old jokes and stale antics; the master of the ring with his curly hair, his black moustache, and his hussar's jacket; the Frenchified-looking grooms in the long coats, who pulled aside the curtain to admit the horses—all these persons were objects of the most boundless admiration, not unmixed with awe. Thunders of applause at the daring of Young Strangler, alternated with roars of boisterous laughter at the witticisms of the clown. These simple-minded shilling people, thoroughly bent upon enjoyment, were pleased even to recognise the scent of the stable, as it was wafted into the circus by the motion of the curtains—that scent which caused Mr. Edgar Greyfaunt to ejaculate many expressions of disgust, and to fan himself with his perfumed handkerchief.

Mr. Edgar Greyfaunt, voting all this intolerably slow and stupid, had strolled into Sir William Long's box. He was not a welcome visitor. Sir William scarcely took the trouble to return his greeting.

"What a horrid bore this is!" yawned the dandy; "and then to have to sit out that dreadful old harridan, Madame Ernestine! Really, it's more

than one can endure. By the way, Long," he continued, "have you noticed that remarkable fellow sitting opposite? Look at him; he's the best part of the show, I think."

Sir William looked across in the direction indicated, and saw seated in one of the lower boxes a man of foreign appearance with grizzled hair, cropped very short, and eyebrows and moustache almost jet black. The dark moustache and eyebrows in contrast with his pale face and grey hair, gave the man a very singular appearance, and Sir William looked at him long and curiously.

"Quite a *lusus naturæ*," said the dandy; "I'll go and ask M'Variety if he knows who he is."

Young Strangler had concluded his Protean performance, and retired amid a tempest of applause; some French acrobats—"the additional attraction"—whom Mr. Thomas Tuttleshell had picked up at the Cirque Impérial in Paris, had illustrated the saying of Voltaire by showing the close resemblance between a Frenchman and a monkey, leaving the tiger part of the likeness to be exhibited in the Leicester-square café, to which they retired to wrangle over their dominoes and absinthe after the performance; the English clown had made some comments in disparagement of foreigners; and then, after a short pause, the orchestra struck up the familiar music, giving warning of the approach of Madame Ernestine,

the world-renowned exponent of the haute-école. The velvet curtains were drawn aside, and Madame Ernestine, erect and stately, slowly entered the arena on her chesnut steed. Sir William Long at the moment was looking across at the foreigner with the grey head and the black moustache. He saw the man start and turn deadly pale, nay, ashy white, for he had been pale before; he saw him spring to his feet and clutch the front of the box, and then immediately sink into his seat again and withdraw from view. *Who* was this man, and what could have so strangely agitated him?

While Sir William was pondering upon the incident, the exposition of the haute-école began. It was the old affair: a long time before it came to anything, then the mare, tossing her neck and pawing with her right fore foot; then, backing to the edges of the ring, whisking her tail and causing a half-tittering, half-screaming commotion among the people in the front seats; then rearing on her haunches, curvetting and plunging, then cantering gently, and at last—as illustrating a buffalo-hunt in the prairies of the Far West—breaking into a gallop. The applause was gradually warming up; and Madame was warming up with it. The more the people applauded, the more she endeavoured to urge the mare forward, now with fierce impatient words, now with her heel dug against her side, now with the whip laid

smartly across her haunches. Faster and more furious! Faster still, in a mad career, kicking up the tan and sawdust and flinging it in showers over the audience, plunging deep into the soft bed of the arena, thudding with her hind hoofs against the hollow boards of the ring, snorting, panting, and reeking with a lather of sweat: round and round she went at a terrible pace, the Countess keeping her seat bravely, and still stimulating the mare to further exertion with tongue, and whip, and heel. Now the scarves are thrown across, and the mare takes them at a bound, first one and then the other, plunging and rearing at every leap. The applause is deafening. The people, carried away by the impetuous career of the horse and its rider, have started to their feet. They are clapping their hands, waving hats and handkerchiefs, and shouting "Bravo! bravo! bravo!"

The mare suddenly refuses a leap, makes a sudden stop, and rears back upon the ring. The Countess wheels her about, and once more puts her to it, with a wrench of the bridle and a savage cut of the whip across her ears. Over she goes with a mad plunge, throwing her hind hoofs high in the air. She is unable to recover herself at the next scarf, and stops a second time. Again the Countess wheels her round and urges her to the leap, while the walls of the wooden building are trembling to the rolling thunder of applause.

At that moment the man with the grey hair and the pale face and the strange black eyebrows and moustache appears in the front of his box.

In the midst of the tempest of applause a scream was heard, and then a heavy thud, and through a shower of sawdust and a steam of sweat the horror-stricken audience saw the form of Madame Ernestine hanging head downwards from the horse, and the next instant lying on the ground in a contorted heap trampled under its hoofs!

The people in the front seats immediately jumped into the arena to render assistance. Foremost among them was the foreign-looking man, with the grizzled hair and the dark eyebrows and moustache. He was the first to reach the prostrate form of the Countess. He knelt down, lifted her into his arms and looked in her face. Her eyes were closed, her lips livid, and her temples were covered with blood.

The man who held her grasped her hand passionately. "Valérie," he cried, in tones of deepest anguish, "speak to me, one word—one word!"

CHAPTER XV.

AT REST.

SEEING that the Countess was seriously injured, Mr. M'Variety elevated himself upon the edge of the ring, and inquired if there were a doctor present. There were several doctors present, all eager and anxious to distinguish themselves in the eyes of the public. There never is any lack of practitioners when accidents occur at places of public entertainment. M.D.s in the stalls, M.B.s in the boxes, M.R.C.S.s in the pit; dentists in the slips, and herbalists in the gallery. It is like asking a question of a clever class at a normal school; a score of arms go up at once. Get off your horse in a London thoroughfare, when you don't happen to be attended by a groom, and bridle-holders innumerable start up out of the earth. Medical

advice was showered thickly upon Mr. M'Variety ; pouring over from the boxes, the circle, and the amphitheatre into the arena, like a cataract of healing waters. Mr. M'Variety would have been puzzled how to act, had he not recognised among the volunteers a personal friend of his own. This gentleman being singled out to attend the case, the others retired in high dudgeon, feeling themselves greatly aggrieved that they had not been allowed to deny themselves a night's rest, and be the instruments of alleviating suffering at the sacrifice of their comfort and of the ordinary reward, which none of them looked for, or would have accepted, if it had been offered to them.

Some horse-cloths were spread upon one of the spring-boards used by the Bounding Brothers of Babylon, and the Countess being laid upon this, was carried out of the ring into the property-room behind the curtain. Sir William Long had gone to the Countess's dressing-room to break the news to Lily, and to offer her what assistance and comfort he could under her new trial. He found her in great agitation, for she had heard the commotion in the circus, and divined that something had happened to her mother. When Sir William told her that the Countess had fallen from the horse and was seriously hurt, the girl sank into a chair, and wept and sobbed bitterly. She had little cause to weep for such a mother ; but, in that one moment

of her misfortune, she forgot and forgave all, and thought of the harsh cruel woman only with love and tenderness and pity.

"I trust, Lily," said Sir William, "I trust you will permit me to be your friend under this trial. I ask for nothing but to be allowed to serve you."

"Oh, Sir William, you are very kind, very good," the weeping girl said, rising, and clasping his hands with both hers. "I shall ever, ever be grateful to you."

Again that cold word! Sir William sighed, and looked at her sadly, taking her little hands between his own, and patting them tenderly.

"Where is my mother?" Lily asked. "I must go to her."

"Stay," said Sir William. "I think you had better not go to her now. It would be too painful; she is under the care of a doctor, and to-morrow she may be better. Wait a little."

"No, no," said Lily; "let me go to her at once; it is my duty. She—she is my mother!"

"Let me accompany you, then," said the baronet; "perhaps I can be of some service."

Lily accepted the offer with gratitude; and, taking her hand, Sir William led her, as he would have led a child, out of the dressing-room and along the dark passage into the shed, to which the insensible form of her mother had been removed.

It had been determined to take the injured woman to the Cottage at once, and four men were carrying her from the circus into the gardens. She was lying in a shapeless heap on the spring-board, covered with horse-cloths. Sir William and Lily, hand in hand, followed the melancholy procession across the stone-paved yard, among litter and property chariots, and horses showing their hind quarters through the open doors of the stables; out through the narrow stage entrance of the circus, where the spring-board had scarcely room to turn; out into the gardens and down the broad walk among the coloured lights, blinking wearily and unsteadily in their cups; under the gaunt and leafless trees, nodding their bare branches like the stalks of funeral plumes that had been stripped of their feathers; past the spectral ash-trees suspending their skeleton hands over the seats of pleasure; moving slowly among the whitewashed statues bathed from head to foot in greenish tears, wrung from the anguish of blighted leaves and the moisture of winter mosses desperately clinging to their verdure—the men passed along with their moaning burden to the Cottage.

Among those who walked by the side of the litter, and close to the figure that lay upon it, the baronet observed the strange-looking man he had noticed in the circus. He called Lily's attention to him, and asked if she knew who he was.

Lily started. She had seen that face before; she remembered it well; yet she could not tell when or where.

"Yes," she said, "I have seen him before—in Paris—no, not in Paris, before that, somewhere, somewhere."

While the girl was wondering, the men paused in the porch with their burden, until the door was opened by Mrs. Snuffburn. Mr. M'Variety took this opportunity to arrest the further progress of the crowd of idlers who had followed the litter through the gardens. When the Countess had been carried in, he remained in the porch to prevent the mob from entering the house. The man with the grey hair and the dark eyebrows and moustache presented himself, and desired to be admitted.

"I cannot allow you to pass," said the manager.

"I am a friend of the lady," said the stranger, "an old friend."

"Oh, no doubt," said the manager, "and I dare say the mob at your heels are all old friends of the lady too."

"I assure you, sir, I am speaking the truth," said the stranger, earnestly; "let me pass, I beseech you."

Sir William Long and Lily came up at this moment. The stranger no sooner saw Lily than he

started, and uttering an exclamation of surprise, held out his hands to her.

"Lily Floris! Lily Floris!" he exclaimed, "do you, can you remember me?"

Lily shrank from the man in alarm.

"Do you really know this young lady?" asked the baronet.

"Yes, sir," the stranger replied, "and her mother also. I am her oldest friend, one that might have been her dearest friend, and have saved her from this." He whispered a word in Sir William's ear.

"You may let this person pass, Mr. M'Variety," said Sir William; "it is no idle curiosity that brings him here."

No, indeed, it was no idle curiosity that prompted Jean Baptiste Constant to follow the bruised and bleeding form of the woman he had once so deeply, madly loved; to seek to stand beside her, perhaps in her last moments, and tell her that though she had rejected his love and requited his kindness with ingratitude and scorn, he was yet willing to forgive her all. They carried the Countess up into the gilded apartment. It was blazing with light, and the table was laid for supper—that supper to which she had invited her aristocratic friends, promising to make a night of it, and be gay.

The men, as they bore her into the room,

stumbled among wine-baskets and dishes of fruit that had been set upon the floor ready for the feast. They carried her at once into her own room, and were about to lift her upon the bed, when the surgeon, drawing aside the curtains, discovered that it had been made the temporary receptacle for champagne bottles. These hastily removed, the injured woman was laid upon the bed; and she lay there for some minutes apparently lifeless, with the full blaze of the lights from the great chandelier falling upon her livid face.

The doctor, finding only a slight scalp wound over her temple, was inclined to think that her injuries were not serious; and this opinion seemed to be confirmed when she opened her eyes and looked about her calmly. But presently, when she drew a full breath, she put her hand to her side and uttered a cry of pain. This told the doctor that there were other injuries, and that the case might be more serious than he had first imagined. He begged Mr. M'Variety to send for another surgeon at once. This was done, and in the mean time the surgeon in attendance endeavoured, with the assistance of Lily and Mrs. Snuffburn, to undress the patient. This, however, she resisted, waving them off with her hand, and groaning piteously every time she drew her breath.

When the other surgeon arrived, a second at-

tempt was made to undress her, but she screamed so dreadfully that the doctors were fain to desist. She lay with her eyes wide open, fixed and staring blankly; her breath was coming in short quick gasps, and at every gasp she uttered a moan. The doctors felt her pulse, and looked at each other anxiously.

Sir William Long and Constant, interpreting their looks, stepped forward to ask their opinion of the case.

"I am afraid she is sinking," said the surgeon of whom he made the inquiry; "she has received some internal injury, and refuses to be moved."

Presently the Countess turned her eyes full upon Lily, who was sitting weeping and trembling by her bedside, and said, in French:

"Is he here?"

Lily looked at her through her tears inquiringly.

"Constant, Constant," her mother gasped out; "Jean Baptiste Constant!"

Constant, who was standing at the door with Sir William Long, heard her mention his name, and entered the chamber.

The eyes of the woman were waiting for him, and when he came upon her view she held out her hand to him.

Constant sprang to the bedside, and, falling upon his knee, took up the hand from the counterpane, upon which it had fallen, and kissed it.

He had kissed that hand once before, when it was rudely drawn from him with a bitter word and a mocking taunt. It was not drawn away from him now.

"Jean Baptiste Constant," she said, feebly, "I am dying; that beast has trodden the life out of me. Tell these people to retire, all but you and—and my child."

The doctors and Mrs. Snuffburn retired, and Constant and Lily were left alone by the bedside of the dying woman. They knelt down together beside her, and waited for her to speak. It was some time before she moved or uttered a word. At length she raised her arm feebly, took Lily's hand, and placed it in that of Constant.

"Protect her," she said; "I leave her to your care."

"I accept the trust," Constant replied, solemnly.

After a pause, the Countess turned her eyes towards Lily, and said, "Withdraw for a little, and leave us—alone."

Lily rose from her knees, blinded with tears, leaving the room, dazed, stupified; filled with a strange wonder.

When the door was closed, the Countess roused herself a little, and grasped Constant's hand almost fiercely.

"Can you forgive me?" she said, despairingly.
"Can you—can you forgive me?"

"Yes, yes," he said; "I can—I do!"

"All?" she asked, eagerly.

"All; everything, everything. Oh, Valérie, Valérie!"

"I have been very wicked, Jean Baptiste, very ungrateful, very cruel, very heartless; but—but it was not my fault. It was born in me, whipped into me, beaten into me with kicks and blows. The devil has been in me from my birth, and held possession of me from first to last. Had he left me for one moment, I might have requited your kindness and been your wife, and we might have been happy now in France. But the devil which possessed me made me proud, ambitious, ungrateful, and wicked, and he has hurried me on to this dreadful end among strangers in a foreign land. Had I been born with a good spirit in me, Jean Baptiste, I should have been good and virtuous, I should have been grateful, I should have returned your love and care, and we might have been happy now in France."

She paused frequently while she murmured these words, laying her hand upon her side, and moaning with a wail of anguish.

"I know," she continued, "I have been very, very wicked; but could I help it, Jean Baptiste? Can wheat grow where only tares have been sown; can flowers spring up from a soil rank with the roots of weeds? You sent me to school to be

taught, to learn to be good ; but it was too late, the evil spirit came with my first breath. I have been possessed, Jean Baptiste, possessed by the devil all my life ; and now, oh Heaven ! what shall I do, what shall I do ? ”

A sudden paroxysm seized her, and she clutched fiercely at the bed-clothes, as if she were struggling with death. When she grew calmer, Constant took her hand gently, and said :

“ Pray, Valérie ; pray to Heaven to forgive you.”

“ I cannot pray,” she said. “ It is so long since I have prayed. I have forgotten how to pray. Oh, mercy, mercy.” She gasped for breath, and again clutched at the bed-clothes fiercely.

Constant rose and went to the door and beckoned to Lily. She entered the room with a scared look upon her face, timidly. Constant took her by the hand and led her to the bedside. Her mother turned and saw her, and grasped at her hand as if for rescue.

“ My child,” she said, “ you are good, you are innocent, you have learnt to pray ; pray for me, pray for me.” She drew Lily’s little hand towards her and implored her with kisses.

And Lily knelt down by the bedside, clasped her hands, and prayed for her mother, looking upwards through her tears, and beseeching God

to pardon her all her sins for the Saviour's sake. The worn, crushed, sin-burdened woman caught at the last blessed words of the prayer, and repeated them again and again, eagerly clinging to them with her failing breath and faltering tongue, until she floated away from earth upon the raft of promise which her child had launched into the sea of her despair.

CHAPTER XVI.

DUST TO DUST.

LILY was once more Quite Alone—alone with her dead mother in the Cottage in the gardens of Ranelagh.

The mystery of her mother's dying words had been explained to her by Jean Baptiste Constant. He repeated to her, with many merciful reservations, the Idyll of Marouille-le-Gency, which the reader knows. Lily was rather afraid of the strange-looking man at first; but when she knew all, and heard from his trembling lips the story of his early love for her mother, of his devotion to her father, and of his care for herself in the days of her childhood, she gave him her complete confidence, and accepted his guardianship gladly.

For she knew now that he had been a father to her—the only father she had ever had. Constant was anxious—eagerly anxious—that she should at once leave the Cottage and take up her abode at Pomeroy's Hotel in Great Grandstreet, of which he was the proprietor. Sir William Long also urged her to leave the Cottage and go to Pomeroy's. But she declined for the present; and begged to be allowed to remain, to perform the last offices to her mother.

Seeing that she was resolved upon this, they refrained from pressing her further.

"Perhaps it will be better," Sir William whispered to Constant, "to withhold the disclosure until after the funeral. Does *he* know?"

"Not yet," Constant replied.

"In that case," said the baronet, "it will be well to say nothing to *him* either. Both must be prepared for it."

"I thought of leaving it to a chance meeting," Constant replied. "He is a singular man."

"And might prefer to be guided by his own impulses."

"Yes," said Constant, "that is my impression."

"You know him best," returned the baronet; "do as you think fit."

Lily observed this whispered conversation, and connecting it with the proposition which had been made to her, wondered why both Sir William

and Constant were so anxious for her to go to Pomeroy's.

An inquest was held upon the body of the Countess, and the jury returned a verdict of accidental death. The moment the inquest was over, Mr. M'Variety, the manager, waited upon Lily with the kind intention of taking the responsibility of the funeral off her hands. In his kindest intentions Mr. M'Variety always had an eye to business.

"I've been thinking, missy," he said, "that your poor mamma ought to have a grand funeral. She was a celebrated public character, you know, and is entitled to it; besides, my dear, she has done so well for me this season, that I should like to show my respect for her."

Lily timidly ventured to think that, under the painful circumstances, it would be better if the funeral were conducted quietly.

Mr. M'Variety, however, did not see it in this light.

"Now, I think you're wrong there, my dear," he said. "When a celebrated person like your ma dies—and we must all die, my dear, some time or other"—Mr. M'Variety had it on the tip of his tongue to add "worse luck," but suddenly discovering that he was moralising prettily, checked himself, and glided over into another sentiment.

“And the least we can do, when eminent personages depart,” he continued, “is to pay respect to their ashes. I don’t know what you think, my dear, but when any friend of mine departs this life, I always feel that I can’t grieve half enough for him—not so much as I ought, you know. It’s such a busy world, my dear, and one’s got so much to attend to, one hasn’t time for it. What I say, then, is, if you haven’t tears for a departed friend, give him feathers; give him six black horses; give him mutes; and if you haven’t time to weep yourself, let crape weep for you. In this busy world, my dear, you’re obliged to do a good deal of this sort of thing by deputy. You’ve been in France most of your life, and don’t know; but in this country, the swells, when they can’t attend a funeral themselves, send their empty carriages, and the horses and the coachmen do the mourning for them.”

Poor Lily! *She* had never been able to shift her burden of sorrow to other shoulders, but had borne her own grief, wearily, for many a day through a vale of bitter tears. She was weeping now.

“Now don’t you cry, missy, or bother yourself about it at all,” said the manager. “I’ll attend to everything. I have a friend at Chelsea Hospital, and I dare say through him I shall be able to borrow the car that was used at the funeral of

Lord Nelson. If it's out of order, Billy Van Post will soon touch it up a bit; or if they won't lend it, Billy can knock up something of the same sort; and we'll have the circus horses out, and I'm sure all my people will attend as a mark of respect to a member of their profession."

Mr. M'Variety was thinking of an advertisement for the gardens. He was not a bad fellow at heart; but he would have exhibited the mummy of his grandmother to promote business.

Luckily for Lily, whose feeble protests were completely overborne by the manager's voluble persistency in settling all the arrangements according to his own fancy, Sir William Long called at the Cottage, accompanied by Mr. Thomas Tuttleshell.

Sir William, of course, would not hear of Mr. M'Variety's proposal, and, with Lily's consent, took the management of the funeral into his own hands. In the midst of her grief and sore trouble Lily found many kind and attentive friends. Constant and Sir William Long visited her daily; Lord Carlton had called twice; old Kafooze came to the door with tears in his eyes to say that he was sorry, very sorry, for having made that unlucky remark about the whip. "If I had thought, my dear, what was going to happen," he whimpered, "I wouldn't have said it for the world. But it

was to be, it was to be; our destiny is with the stars, and we cannot alter it."

Poor old tender-hearted Kafoose! He was afraid that Lily might hate him for having prophesied evil; and he came to ask her pardon and plead with her for forgiveness.

Every one whom she had known at the gardens called at the Cottage to press her hand and console her with a kind word—every one but Edgar Greyfaunt.

Where was Edgar?

This was the first thought that arose in her breast when she recovered from the shock of her mother's death. She knew that he was in the circus at the time of the accident, for she had gone into the passage behind the boxes, and in peeping through the chink of a box door she had seen him talking to Sir William Long. When the Countess was carried out, Sir William Long, Lord Carlton, Mr. Tuttleshell, every one of her friends and patrons had followed to the Cottage—every one except Edgar.

Whither had he gone? Why had he gone? Why had he not called to see her, to speak a word to her, to make an inquiry concerning her mother? Lily's vacant heart was filled with these distracting questions, racking her with doubts and fears which she could not bear to think of. They

struggled again and again to rise to her tongue; but again and again she repressed them and kept them down, dreading to reveal to others even a suspicion of the vague fear which agitated her. Every footstep on the gravel-walk outside, every knock at the Cottage door, aroused hopes of Edgar's coming. Her tongue was silent; but her restless eye betrayed the troubled thoughts which possessed her breast.

A few minutes after the arrival of Sir William Long, accompanied by Mr. Tuttleshell, Mrs. Snuffburn came in to say that there was a person below wanting to see *some one*.

"Who is the person?" the manager asked.

"I don't know, sir," said the housekeeper; "he is a stranger to me."

"What does he want?" said the manager.
"Go and ask his business."

Mrs. Snuffburn was saved the trouble. The stranger had ascended the stairs and entered the room before Mr. M'Variety had finished speaking.

"Mr. M'Variety," he said, "we received this cheque the other day from Madame Ernestine in payment of a wine bill; we gave her a receipt and the change out of it, and to-day the cheque has been returned from the bank, marked 'no effects.' In fact, sir, it has been dishonoured."

"What is the amount, and whose cheque is it?" the manager asked.

"It is a cheque for twenty pounds," said the man, "and it is signed 'Edgar Greyfaunt.'"

Lily blushed crimson.

"There must be some mistake," said the manager. "Mr. Greyfaunt is a man of fortune; you'd better make inquiries again."

"It would save us much trouble, sir," said the man, "if you would pay the money."

"Oh, I can't do that," said the manager; "it's no affair of mine, you know, and——"

"Stay," said Sir William Long; "let us have no more words about the matter." And he took out his pocket-book and handed the man notes for the amount of the cheque.

"Now, sir, you may go."

The man put the dishonoured cheque on the table, took up the notes, and left the room.

Mr. Edgar Greyfaunt had paid more for his box than any of the others, but his cheque was worth exactly the value of the paper upon which it was written.

Mr. Thomas Tuttleshell triumphed in his secret soul.

"The insolent Brummagem puppy!" he muttered between his teeth.

Mr. Tuttleshell's only regret was, that the solemnity of the occasion forbade him to give audible expression to his satisfaction. But though he restrained himself for the moment, he could

not leave without easing his soul by a commentary on Greyfaunt's shabby conduct. It was to Lily that he made the remark.

"I always thought that fellow, Greyfaunt, was an impostor," he said, "and now I am sure of it. Wasn't it good of Sir William to pay the money and save the fellow's credit, in the way he did? And without a word, too! Ah, Sir William is a real gentleman, my dear, with a big heart."

Honest Thomas! he knew not the conflict of painful emotions which these words aroused in Lily's throbbing breast.

Under the direction of Sir William Long, the funeral was conducted as plainly and privately as possible. In humble and unpretending fashion—much to Mr. M'Variety's regret, for he felt that he was losing a magnificent advertisement for the opening of the summer season—the beautiful Vaudrien Valérie, once the bright particular star of the Paris theatres, the reigning queen among the beauties of her day, the dazzling enslaver of hearts, and the wife of Francis Blunt, Esquire, an English gentleman of high lineage and ancient descent, was carried to her last home, followed by an irregular train of horse-riders, and acrobats, and circus clowns.

Her grave had been dug at Kensal-green by order of Mr. M'Variety, who, contemplating an open car and a display of circus horses, was de-

sirous that the route might be as long as possible : on the principle of the longer the route the better the advertisement.

Sir William Long did not join the procession at the gardens, but drove down by himself, early, and waited among the tombstones for its arrival. It was a fine, clear, frosty day, and the sun shone out cheerfully. Sir William wandered about among the monuments, thoughtful and moody. It was almost a new scene to him, for he had rarely stood among graves and felt the chastening influence which the contemplation of death exercises upon thoughtful minds. He was surprised to find himself musing pleasantly, looking death in the face in his own dominion, calmly and without fear ; nay, almost envying those who slept so peacefully under mound and stone. What was it that had so subdued the heart of this man of fashion, this pleasure-loving bachelor, with all the gay delights of the world at his command, with ample wealth, with health and strength, and many days yet before him ? What was it ? What could it be but love, the true love of the heart, which is akin to all that is pure and holy, that love which is almost a redemption in itself, which sanctifies all things, and is a witness to the divine likeness in which man was made. It was the image of Lily's sweet face that hovered about him, brightening the scene, and robbing the graves of their

terror. How he loved her! oh, so tenderly, so purely, with all his heart and with all his soul! He had led a gay, reckless life, and though in the pursuit of his pleasures he had never been heartless, or cruel, or mean, he knew and felt that he had much to answer for. But that account seemed to be redeemed by the purifying influence of the love which now filled his breast. He felt that he was a better man for it.

Sir William was startled from his reflections by a noise of wheels on the gravel-path behind him. It was the hearse containing the body of the Countess, followed by the two mourning coaches. He helped Lily from her coach, and stood beside her at the mouth of the grave. Constant stood on the other side of her, and took her hand, and as dust was cast upon dust, and ashes were scattered upon ashes, Jean Baptiste Constant looked down into the grave of hopes long since blighted, long since dead, hopes that had been born and nursed in the quiet village of Marouille-le-Gency, far away in France, but which now lay here in a foreign land, buried for ever. Was it in mercy to his blank and desolate heart that the sun burst from a passing cloud and fell upon the coffin, lighting up the name upon the plate as with a halo of glory—a promise of hope hereafter?

Sir William walked by Lily's side to the coach

and helped her in. He held out his hand to her, and she took it and pressed it warmly.

"You are going now," he said, "to a new life. May I still be your friend?"

A new life! What did he mean by those words? Lily knew not as yet; but to his last entreaty she replied, with deep emotion:

"I shall ever think of you, ever love you, ever be grateful to you."

And seated in the mourning coach beside Jean Baptiste Constant, she was carried away to her new home.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DISCOVERY.

POMEROY's in Great Grand-street was an hotel much patronised by persons from the Eastern Indies—officers home on sick leave, dark-skinned princes, who wore earrings and jewelled caps, and who, standing at the windows in a blaze of diamonds and brocade, seemed to be perpetually waiting for cabs to take them to a masquerade; by maharajahs, begums, governors-general, judges of the supreme courts, and millionaire merchants returned to their native land, with the fond design of enjoying the fruits of their long labours without livers to help the process of digestion.

Pomeroy's "laid itself out" for this particular class of patronage. Its apartments were furnished with great magnificence, displaying much gilding,

embroidery, and yellow silk ; it had suites of private rooms adapted for every variety of social habit, and for the practice of every form of Eastern religious observance ; it provided separate rooms for various castes, nicely discriminating as to the requirements for different manners of eating, smoking, praying, and taking the bath ; it had kitchens for all sorts of cookery, Christian and Mahomedan, Brahmin and Hindoo ; clean and unclean.

Pomeroy's was a very expensive establishment to stop at ; and this was one of its chief recommendations to the Indian magnificos who patronised it. By taking up their residence at Pomeroy's, they proclaimed to all their friends and to the public at large, through the medium of the *Morning Post*, that they were very rich, and consequently very important, personages. The frequenters of Pomeroy's would not have been content to accept the same accommodation elsewhere for less money. What they chiefly took a pride in was the fact that they paid an exorbitant price for everything they had. If any visitor after a week's residence at Pomeroy's had received a bill for such a modest sum as ten, or a dozen pounds, he would have resented it as an insult to his dignity. He would have suspected at once that he had been badly served ; that they had given him inferior curry to eat, inferior wine to drink, inferior chairs to sit upon, and an inferior bed to sleep in. What was the object in going

to Pomeroy's? Was it not to be able to eat five-pound notes and drink sovereigns!

Such was Pomeroy's Hotel, of which Jean Baptiste Constant was the manager and nominal proprietor.

Constant, sitting in the mourning coach with Lily, on the way to Great Grand-street, opened a conversation with the view of preparing her for her new life and her new prospects. He began with some hesitation, for he had to tell her first of all about her father. Lily had remained, up to that moment, ignorant even of her father's name. She had continued to call herself, and to be called, Lily Floris. She was to know now that her name was Blunt.

"And, my father?" she said, inquiringly; "all that I have heard of him is, that he ill-treated my mother, that he was a bad man, and very poor—a beggar. Was he a beggar?"

"Your father, Lily," said Constant, evading a direct reply to the question in this form, "was a gentleman."

Francis Blunt was all that the Countess called him, a cheat, a scoundrel, and a beggar; but from the valet's point of view he was still a gentleman.

"More than that," Constant continued, "your father was a member of a noble family of high descent and great wealth; and you, as his child, Lily Blunt, are a lady."

Lily felt a strange fluttering at her heart. It was not pride; it was scarcely joy. She was thinking of Edgar. Did *he* know that she was the daughter of an English gentleman?

"It is possible," said Constant, "that you may shortly meet some of your English relatives, and be elevated to the position to which your birth entitles you. I have been searching for you for a long time, with the view of making you acquainted with your position, and, if possible, rescuing you from the misery which you have so long endured; but until chance took me to the circus at Ranelagh I failed in every endeavour to discover you."

Lily thanked him from the bottom of her heart. In the midst of her misery and desolation, she had never dreamt that any one in the wide world was thinking of her. If she could only have known it, her heart would not have been so dead to all hope.

Constant continued:

"It is my inclination, no less than my sacred duty, Lily, for I love you as if you were my own child—it is my dearest wish and desire to see you restored to your family; and I will do everything it is possible to do, with that object; but if I should fail—if the hope which I entertain should be disappointed—will you let me be your guardian, your protector, your father?"

He implored her eagerly, as if he were afraid of

being met by the proud and scornful spirit of her mother.

Lily, whose heart was overflowing with gratitude, put all his doubts to flight at once. She seized his hands, and kissed them fervently.

"Heaven bless you!" she said. "I desire nothing better than to be your daughter, to tell you all that lies at my heart, and to ask for your advice and guidance."

In all his lifetime, Jean Baptiste Constant had not experienced so pure a joy as at that moment. He felt a tremor of delight run through his whole frame. His heart, long since frozen up, melted before the sunshine of the girl's trusting, loving face, looking into his and calling up a bright vision of the past—his eyes filled with tears, and the strong, hardened, man wept.

"God bless you!" he said; "those words have given me the first thrill of real pleasure I have ever felt since your mother was a girl, such as you are now, in the little village of Marouille, in France, where I first saw her."

Constant stopped the coach at the corner of Great Grand-street, got out with Lily, and walked the rest of the way to the hotel. He paused as they were about to enter the house, and said:

"You will not forget that your name is Lily Blunt."

As Constant passed through the hall with Lily

to his own private apartments, the situation and its attendant circumstances carried him back to his old life at the Lilies of France, to that time when Valérie was budding into beauty, and stirring in his heart the flame of love long since quenched. A sigh escaped him as he thought of those days of hope, but the remembrance read him a lesson.

After Lily had partaken of some refreshment, and rested for a little in the handsome sitting-room behind the bar, Constant, who had been attending to the affairs of the hotel, returned to the room, and with considerable hesitation and mystery of manner, requested her to perform a service.

Lily jumped up eagerly, and expressed her willingness to make herself useful to her guardian in any way.

"I long," she said, "to be employed, to have something to do, and if you will only let me be your servant——"

Constant stopped her.

"You forget, Lily, that you are a lady," he said.

"I have no idea of making you a servant; but on this one occasion will you oblige me by——"

Lily interrupted him with an eager offer to perform any service he might require.

"Well, listen," he said; "you shall be a chambermaid for once, and take up this glass of elder-flower water to the gentleman in the blue room. Come, I will show you the way."

Lily took the silver salver from his hands, and followed him to the foot of the grand staircase.

"It is the second room on the first landing," he said. "Knock at the door before you enter."

Lily ascended the softly-carpeted stair, and proceeded as directed to the second door in the corridor. She knocked gently and timidly. There was no answer. She looked round and saw Constant standing at the foot of the stairs, watching her. She knocked again, and this time a feeble voice called "Come in."

Lily opened the door and entered the room. It was a magnificent apartment furnished in blue and gold, with many ottomans and couches, covered with skins and richly-embroidered cloths, and, for the moment, Lily was so dazzled by the splendour of the fittings, and her vision so lost in the vastness of the room, that she failed to discover the occupant who bade her enter. At last her eye was attracted by a movement on one of the couches, and on advancing further into the room, she discerned the figure of a man reclining upon a heap of pillows. He was an old man with grey hair and a very sallow complexion.

Lily went up to the couch with the salver in her hand, and offered him the goblet of water. The old man turned to take it; and, as he did so, looked up in Lily's face. His outstretched hand

suddenly fell by his side, and he uttered a cry of surprise.

"Again *that* face!" he exclaimed; "again that bright vision that I have seen so often; in life twice, in my dreams many times."

He passed his hand across his eyes, as if he were doubting his senses, and imagined that he was dreaming them. At length Lily spoke.

"I have been desired to bring you this, sir," she said, stooping towards him with the goblet.

"Then it's not a dream this time," he said. "Who are you? Come nearer; let me touch you."

It was now Lily's turn to be startled. She hesitated, and retired a step, timidly.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "I'm only a poor, weak old man; old before my time, my dear. Come close to me, and let me touch your hand."

He spoke kindly and tenderly; and Lily, dismissing her foolish fears—for he was, as he said, only a poor, weak old man—advanced to the couch and held out her hand.

The old man took it and held it between his own cold palms, and peered into the girl's face curiously.

"The same blue eyes," he muttered, "the same soft brown hair, just as I can remember them—just as they are in the picture. Ah, you are a

bonny, bonny lass, just like her, just like her. Thank you; it's very kind of you to come up; come again, my dear, come again. Stop, you may as well tell me your name."

"My name is Lily, sir."

"Lily, Lily," he repeated. "Ah, that is a pretty name; and what else?"

"Blunt, sir," Lily replied.

The invalid, who had been reclining so languidly upon the couch, apparently without the strength to turn himself, started at the word, and sprang to his feet.

"Blunt," he exclaimed, "Blunt! Am I dreaming, or—or are you playing a trick upon me?"

Lily scarcely knew what to reply to these inquiries. Who was this old man, and why had the mention of her name so strangely excited him?

The invalid sank back upon the couch again, and sat gazing at Lily with a child-like wonder.

"Tell me," he said, "who are you? Who was your father? Was he Frank Blunt? Eh? eh?"

"I believe so, sir," Lily answered.

"You believe so," he repeated; "you believe so. Don't you *know* who your father was?"

"I have been told that my father's name was Francis Blunt."

"You have been told so, and don't know of your own knowledge. That's odd—very odd. And

how did you come here, my dear? How did a Blunt come to be a servant in a hotel?"

"I am not exactly a servant, sir," Lily replied.

"Not exactly a servant!" he said. "Then what are you? I don't understand it; it's all a mystery, a puzzle. Here, Franz, Franz, Franz Stimm, you rascal, come here."

It was clear that Franz Stimm was a party to Constant's plot, for he entered the room immediately his name was called.

"Come here, sir," said the invalid; "do you know this young lady, or anything about her?"

"Yah mein signor, of course I knows dat young leddi; she is de liddle cal, ver mooch grown big, vat we see in de steam-boat. Ah," the courier continued, addressing Lily; "you forget me; but I not forget your preddy face."

"I have not forgotten you," said Lily; "you were very kind to me."

"Vat," cried Franz, "you remember de joggo-late, eh?"

"What do you know about the young lady, Stimm?" the invalid asked.

"Mein generale," said the courier, "I know dat she is ver preddy cal; but Monsieur Constant knows all about her fadder and her modder, de andsome dame you know, dat loog like de diger in de steam-boat."

"Then, let Monsieur Constant attend me," said the invalid.

Monsieur Constant was not far off, and Stimm returned with him instantly. Monsieur Constant explained all to the invalid in a few words. Lily was the daughter of Francis Blunt.

"And I," said the invalid, raising himself and holding out his hands to Lily, "I am George Blunt, your father's brother, and your uncle. Let me be your uncle and your father both, for poor Frank's sake, and for our mother's sake; you are the very image of her."

And so Lily was adopted by the rich old nabob of Cutchapore, a widower without chick or child of his own to leave his millions to.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BROKEN IDOL.

LILY was now no longer Quite Alone. Her uncle idolised her, and was never tired of smoothing her beautiful brown hair and gazing with childish rapture at her lovely blue eyes.

George Blunt had not brought much liver home with him from India, but he had managed to preserve his heart. The former organ he had exercised overmuch, the latter not at all. In the pursuit of money-getting he had put his heart aside altogether, preserved it, as it were, in spirits of wine in a sealed bottle. And now, when he had done with rupee grubbing, he opened the bottle and found his heart in a fine state of preservation.

He was quite foolish in his demonstrations of affection towards his pretty niece. He could not

bear her to be out of his sight for a moment. He fondled her and patted her as a child plays with a doll; he said inconceivably silly things to her in praise of her good looks, such childish nonsensical things that Lily quite blushed for him. If she had been a doll he would certainly never have rested until he had taken out and examined those lovely blue eyes which he was always looking at with so much wonder and delight.

Constant was jealous of the old man. So was Franz Stimm. Constant almost repented of having brought Lily and her uncle together. The good-hearted courier went about regretting that the "preddy liddle cal" had outgrown her taste for joggolate. He took courage one day, and respectfully suggested joggolate. Lily took some which the courier offered her, and thanked him with many smiles, putting the sweetmeat in her pocket. Franz was quite hurt because she did not eat it there and then.

"Ah," he muttered to himself, "she is too big leddi now for joggolate; she is afraid of her stom-jacks; but de liddle cal is nevare afraid of her stomjacks; oh no."

George Blunt had heard the history of his brother Frank's career from Constant, and reproached himself bitterly for not having been at hand to help him in his distress and misery. He now heard from Lily the history of her sad life, and the pitiful

story moved him to tears. She told him all, not even omitting the cause of her flight from Madame de Kergolay's—her passion for Edgar Greyfaunt.

"He is not worthy of you, my dear, can't be worthy of you," he said, "to treat you as he has done. But you shall be as good as he, or any of them; the blood of the Blunts runs in your veins; and the money of George Blunt shall chink in your pocket, and I'll warrant you'll have a score of fellows at your feet in no time."

The Indian nabob, vain of his ancient lineage, and no less proud of his wealth, was deeply hurt at the idea of his brother's child being slighted and looked down upon; and he resolved that Lily should not only vindicate her position, but also glorify the family name. He had nothing to show in his own person (for he was a mere bag of bones) for the immense riches which he had acquired in India. His poor mummy of a body, wrapped in the finest furs, and adorned with diamonds and brilliants, was but an object of pity.

Lily rose upon the old man's vision like a star in the dark. He found a beautiful idol upon which to hang his gold and his pearls—one who would wear them worthily, and command homage to his wealth. He loaded her with presents, dressed her in the richest robes, decked her with the rarest gems, engaged for her the handsomest suite of apartments in the hotel, bought her a Brougham, and

a saddle-horse, and appointed a maid and a groom specially to attend upon her. The poor, friendless, lonely girl, so recently discharging the humble duties of a horse-rider's dresser in the gardens of Ranelagh, was now a princess.

But the jewels and the fine dresses did not make Lily happy. In the midst of the splendour in which she lived, she was thinking with an aching heart of Edgar. His sudden disappearance on the night of her mother's death, and the return of his cheque, filled her with a vague fear that something had happened to him. She shrank from making inquiries about him; partly from a feeling of modesty, partly because she was unwilling that any one should think she doubted him. She resolved to say nothing on the subject, for a time at least; hoping that he would soon call to see her, or that she might meet him in the Park during her rides and drives. She went into the Park daily, either in her Brougham, or on horseback. She had taken lessons at a riding-school, and became in a very short space of time an accomplished horsewoman. She had learned fast; for love was her teacher. She had learned to ride, that she might dispense with the attendance of a coachman and footman, and go out in the Park on horseback "*Quite Alone.*" Her uncle humoured her in everything. If she had desired to ride in the Park on an elephant, he would have sent emissaries into Africa

to procure her the finest specimen that could be found.

Weeks passed away, and Edgar had not called at the hotel; nor had Lily succeeded in meeting him in the Park. Her uncle and Constant had observed that, spite of her daily exercise in the fresh air, she was becoming pale, and thin, and careworn. Constant was aware of Lily's passion for Edgar, and feeling assured that her malady was love-sickness, he begged to be admitted to her confidence. After some hesitation she told him the state of the case frankly. She had been looking for Edgar day after day, and week after week, but in vain. She was afraid that he was ill, or that some misfortune had befallen him. Constant undertook to make inquiries. He did so; and found that the magnificent Mr. Greyfaunt had been arrested for debt, and was locked up in a spunging-house in Cursitor-street.

The young scapegrace had set up for a man of fashion upon the little fortune left him by his grand-aunt, Madame de Kergolay. It amounted to five thousand pounds, neither more nor less, and Edgar had spent the principal instead of the interest, living for the time at the rate of three thousand a year.

Constant did not at once inform Lily of the discovery he had made. He was anxious to find out what sort of person Mr. Edgar Greyfaunt was.

He had no particular doubts about him before ; but now, when he heard of him as the inhabitant of a spunging-house, he began at once to suspect that Edgar was a very bad young fellow. As a prosperous innkeeper, Monsieur Constant regarded impecuniosity in a gentleman of Mr. Greyfaunt's position as the worst of crimes.

Constant employed Franz Stimm as his emissary and agent. Stimm visited the spunging-house, and saw Edgar, saying that he came from an unknown friend who was anxious to serve him. A few weeks behind prison bars had worked a great change upon the dandy—the usual change. The loss of liberty had degraded him, as it degrades nearly all men, however proud their spirit, however high their moral tone. In a few weeks the elegant exquisite had been transformed into a shabby, slouching, jail-bird. He had taken to slippers and wide-awake hats, to spirits-and-water and clay pipes. He shuffled about in a paved yard behind the bars, and associated without scruple with all comers. Debt is a great leveller—as great a leveller almost as death. In a spunging-house or a prison it brings all ranks together, and links them in the bond of a common brotherhood. The most noble person in a debtors' prison is he who owes most money. But the pettiest shopkeeper is on a footing with a lord in one respect—he is a debtor. The influence of debt and durance manifests itself in both alike—it

conduces to down-at-heel shoes, carelessness as to clean linen, the growth of the beard, the smoking of common kinds of tobacco, and the consumption of vulgar drinks. Even if the lord have money, he finds, after a short residence in a debtors' prison, that he is acquiring a taste for the grosser kinds of luxuries. He begins to prefer shag tobacco to cigars, and to have an inordinate craving for beer.

Edgar very soon succumbed to the genius of that dingy house in Cursitor-street. Franz Stimm wondered what the preddy leddle leddi could see in such a shabby-looking fellow. Franz was armed with very careful instructions. He informed Greyfaunt of Lily's accession to fortune. She had found her uncle, a rich Indian nabob (he did not mention his name), who had adopted her and designed to leave her the whole of his vast wealth.

Edgar caught at the news eagerly, and his eyes sparkled with expectancy. "What a fool! what an ass I have been!" he muttered to himself. He questioned Stimm as to the motives of the unknown friend who had sent him the news. Stimm explained that the unknown friend, who was aware of the position in which Mr. Greyfaunt stood towards Miss Lily, had an eye to business.

"Ah, I perceive," said Edgar; "he is a money-lender, and you are his agent."

Franz admitted that that might be the case.

"Well, look here," said Edgar; "if you will lend me the money and get me out of this cursed place, you shall have a hundred per cent. for your master, and fifty per cent. for yourself. It is only a miserable sum of two hundred pounds."

"But de security?" said Stimm.

"I have no security to offer you but my own note of hand," said Greyfaunt, "and you know what my expectations are. The girl is madly in love with me, and I have only to make her an offer to secure the prize. She will throw herself into my arms, fortune and all."

"Vil you gif me a letter to dat effeck dat I show mein master?" said Stimm.

"Certainly," said Greyfaunt. "Who is your master? Let me know the name of my disinterested friend?"

"His name is Constant," said the courier.

"What! Constant, who keeps Pomeroy's Hotel?"

"De same," said Franz.

"Ah," said Greyfaunt, gaily, "they are sharp fellows, those hotel-keepers. Constant has, no doubt, got wind of the girl's attachment to me, and wants to do a stroke of business over the affair. Very good, Monsieur Constant, I am obliged to you."

And the heartless puppy, who would not have hesitated to buy Lily first and sell her afterwards, sat down and wrote a letter to the hotel-keeper. It ran thus:

"SIR,—If you are willing to lend me two hundred pounds, I will give you my note of hand for five hundred, or a larger sum if you require it. I understand that you are fully aware of the freak of fortune which has transformed the daughter of a circus-woman into a sort of Indian princess. I believe, too, you are not ignorant of the fact that she is devoted to me, and that I have only to hold up my finger to make her mine. Nothing stands between me and the golden prize but the bolts and bars of this infernal cage. You may ascertain this for yourself, only use discretion. If you serve me in this, you shall have no reason to complain of your share of the plunder.

"Yours, &c.,

"EDGAR GREYFAUNT.

"To J. B. Constant, Esquire."

"There," said Greyfaunt, "take your master that, and let me have an answer at once. Delays are dangerous in these cases."

Stimm took the letter to his master, and Jean Baptiste Constant opened and read it. He had already been warned with respect to Greyfaunt's character, but he was not prepared for such heartlessness, such sordid baseness as this letter disclosed.

"The scoundrel!" he muttered through his teeth. "It is lucky for him I did not go, Stimm. I should have murdered him. And it is for such

a wretch as this that poor Lily is sighing her life away! She cannot know how base he is, but she shall know; she shall not remain ignorant of his character for another hour."

Constant's first impulse was to show Lily the letter at once, but on reflection he decided to proceed more cautiously, and to break the news by degrees. He told her, first, that he had succeeded in discovering Greyfaunt.

Lily's eager look of pleasure pained him, and filled his breast with anger. He could scarcely restrain himself. To the torrent of anxious inquiries which she poured upon him, he replied coldly, without any further attempt to soften the information which he had to convey.

"Edgar Greyfaunt," he said, "is a heartless adventurer. Read that letter."

Lily read the letter, read it again and again without lifting her eyes, and at length her head sank upon her bosom, and the letter fell from her hands upon the floor. The idol her yearning heart had set up for itself in the days of her solitude lay crushed and broken at her feet.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SULTAN DETHRONED.

SIR WILLIAM LONG had called many times upon Lily in her new home, hovering about her with a throbbing heart and a declaration of love faltering upon his tongue. That pure and tender love had rolled back twenty years of his life, and made him feel a boy again. He had feasted his full upon all the vain pleasures of the world, and had become sick and weary of them; but now, with the image of Lily's sweet, innocent face ever before him, his zest for life was renewed: he felt that there was yet something better worth living for than all the empty pleasures in which he had wasted his youth.

The old Indian had received him kindly, and shown him much favour. He was flattered by the

baronet's attentions, and liked his company. From that quarter he had every encouragement. Lily, too, was always glad to see him, and often expressed her gratitude for all his kindness. But it was only gratitude. Sir William saw that she was still thinking of Edgar.

He longed to disenchant her, by telling her all he knew of the worthless young fellow; but his chivalrous spirit shrank from the act to which his longing heart prompted him. He felt that it would be almost baseness on his part to seek to advance his own suit by damaging the character of a rival. Yet, as a friend, it was his duty to warn Lily against forming a connexion which he felt certain would lead only to misery. He was well acquainted with Edgar Greyfaunt, and knew that he was utterly heartless and mercenary. He was assured that the moment Edgar heard of Lily's accession to fortune he would hasten to pay court to her, and he had too much reason to fear that his addresses would be eagerly accepted. How it was that Edgar had not made his appearance before now Sir William could not understand; but, as he had not made his appearance, he was satisfied that the news of Lily's fortune had not reached him. The last that Sir William had seen of the dandy was in the circus at Ranelagh, when he hurried away the moment the Countess fell from the horse, flippantly remarking that the dreadful old harridan had no

doubt broken her neck. Sir William could only suppose that the young fellow had gone to Paris on some business connected with his grand-aunt's estate. He saw that Lily was dying to know what had become of her idol; but, as she never made any inquiries of him, he refrained from alluding to the subject. He saw no honourable course open to him but to remain silent and abide the turn of events.

As weeks wore on, and Lily still continued to be absorbed by thoughts of her Sultan, Sir William's visits to the hotel became less frequent, and at last when he called he merely left a card, going away without seeing either Lily or her uncle. He was afraid that his attentions pained Lily; for he found it impossible to conceal the nature of the regard which he entertained for her, and he knew how deeply it would wound her to feel that she was rejecting his love and thinking of another. It was, therefore, to spare her feelings, not his own, that he denied himself the pleasure of visiting her.

But though Sir William no longer called at Pomeroy's, he contrived to see Lily every day. He was hovering about her often when she little dreamt that he was even thinking of her. At night he would saunter round about the hotel and look up at the windows of the old Indian's apartments until the lights went out, and then he would watch for lights to appear in the chambers above, and in one of

them, perhaps the wrong one, he would picture Lily : and conjuring up her lovely face in his mind's eye, he would stand there dreaming, with his back against a lamp-post, until he was recalled to himself by the impudent commentary of some vulgar street boy.

Lily went out a great deal, to the opera and to the theatres ; and always in the afternoon she appeared in Rotten Row on horseback *Quite Alone*. Sir William followed her like her shadow, sighing like a furnace, and gazing at her with longing eyes ; but on all occasions taking much pains to avoid intruding himself upon her notice. Her eyes were always searching, searching for some one ; but they never rested upon Sir William. Alas ! he knew too well that they were not searching for him. At length the mysterious little lady who was seen everywhere in public *Quite Alone*, who seemed to have no friends, who never spoke to any one, and who was sometimes found dining by herself in the coffee-rooms of hotels, became the subject of scandalous talk. And this it was that caused Sir William, in the opening chapter of this history, to exclaim, " Ah, Lily, how long will you give all these idle tongues some ground to tattle ; how long will you persist in being *Quite Alone* ? "

Not for long now. The idol had revealed its worthless clay ; the scales had fallen from her too trusting eyes.

Constant, who was aware of Sir William's passion, and favoured it, wrote to the baronet, and informed him of the discovery of Edgar. Sir William immediately called at the hotel and learned all particulars. The letter did not surprise him, but he was infinitely relieved to find that Lily's eyes were at last opened, and that she had escaped the danger which he so much dreaded. So pure and disinterested was his love for the girl, that for the moment he had no thought of himself. And so scrupulous was his sense of honour, that he drew a cheque for two hundred pounds, and insisted upon Constant sending it to the scapegrace in fulfilment of the promise that had been implied, if not actually made, by the overtures of Franz Stimm.

"The scamp does not deserve it," said Constant.

"Perhaps not," said the baronet; "but that is no reason that we should be less than gentlemen. Get the cheque cashed at the bank, and give him the money in your own name."

The money was duly conveyed to Edgar, and the first thing the graceless young puppy did on getting out of the spunging-house, was to array himself in a dandified suit of clothes and call at Pomeroy's Hotel. Constant, when he met him in the hall, could scarcely refrain from kicking him into the street. The Sultan was as high and mighty, as haughty and insolent as ever. He leaped from his cab and swaggered into the hotel with the confident

air of an invading Cæsar. His manner said as plainly as any words, "I have come, and when I have seen I shall conquer."

"You may depend upon me, my good fellow," he said to Constant, with a patronising air. "Your trouble shall be well rewarded; but between you and me and the post," he added, tapping Constant on the shoulder with his cane, "I begin to suspect that the little party sent you, eh?"

Constant could scarcely keep his hands off the insolent dog.

"You had better see the lady yourself," he said. "I will send up your card. No doubt Miss Blunt will be glad to see you."

Greyfaunt started at the name.

"Blunt!" he said; "is that her name?"

"I should have thought," said Constant, "you would be acquainted with the name of a lady who is so devoted to you."

"Well," said Greyfaunt, "her mother called herself Madame Ernestine; but then these circus women take all sorts of absurd names. I only knew the girl as Lily. Blunt, you say? Surely her father was not that dirty, drunken old beggar, Griffin Blunt, who put an end to his miserable existence in the Seine, after he was kicked out of a gaming house?"

"Miss Blunt's father was a gentleman, sir," said

Constant, glaring at him angrily. "But here is Miss Blunt's answer."

The servant who had taken up Greyfaunt's card here returned and presented him with a letter.

"I am instructed," he said, "to return this to you, and to say that Miss Blunt has read it."

Greyfaunt was completely taken aback. He saw at a glance that it was his own letter, the letter he had addressed to Constant. He opened it hurriedly to make sure of this, and his eye fell upon his own words, "If you serve me in this, you shall have no reason to complain of your share of the plunder."

"Why, what does this mean?" Edgar stammered out.

"It means, sir," said Constant, "that the lady is now aware of your true character, and has nothing more to say to you."

"And *you* did this?" said Greyfaunt, with an assumed air of indignation.

"Yes, *I* did it," Constant replied, deliberately, "and from the bottom of my soul I rejoice to think that I have been instrumental by any means in saving this innocent young lady from the toils of such a worthless wretch as thou."

Base and worthless as Edgar was, he had the courage and spirit which are always more or less induced and cultivated by breeding.

“Insolent scoundrel!” he cried, “how dare you insult a gentleman?” And in the heat and passion of the moment he struck at Constant with his cane.

The hotel-keeper avoided the blow, and with great coolness walked up to the dandy, wrenched his cane from him, and broke it across his knee. “Turn that man out of the hotel,” Constant said, in a tone of command, to his servants.

Two stalwart fellows in livery immediately stepped forward, and, seizing Greyfaunt by the collar, hurried him down the steps, and bundled him into the street, Constant throwing his broken cane out after him.

It is possible that the crestfallen Sultan, as he slunk out of Great Grand-street that day, recalled a similar scene in Paris in which he had some share. Poor Griffin Blunt was avenged.

CHAPTER XX.

HAPPINESS.

THE discovery of Edgar's baseness was a sad blow to Lily, yet she was not altogether unprepared for it. When the first bitterness of her disappointment was over, and she began to reflect upon all she had seen and known of the idol of her heart, she was fain to confess to herself that he had given her little cause to love him. When she first saw him in Paris she was almost a child, and Edgar had treated her as such, but she remembered now that he had treated her haughtily and almost contemptuously. He had never played or romped with her, never paid her any little attentions, nor even encouraged her with a look or a smile. Yet she had set him up in her heart as the embodiment of all that was beautiful, and good, and lovable.

When he encountered her again at the gardens of Ranelagh, he had merely shown by a look and an exclamation that he recognised her. He did not send to make any inquiries about her, nor did he call again to see her until he visited the Cottage with Sir William Long, Lord Carlton, and others, a few days before her mother's death. The only kind words he had ever addressed to her were spoken on that occasion, and he merely said he "hoped they would be better friends in London." Why had he not been her friend in Paris, when she so sorely wanted one? She remembered that his advance was made when other friends were flocking round her, when the little bird had whispered to her that agonising secret of another love, which she could requite only with gratitude. She recalled, too, that Edgar disappeared suddenly from the circus, when Sir William and Lord Carlton remained to help and sustain her in her terrible trial; she thought of the returned cheque; of the contempt which honest Mr. Tuttleshell had expressed for the young fellow, and of the ill opinion which Constant and her uncle instinctively formed of him before they had seen him. And always when she went back and reviewed Edgar's conduct from first to last, she found Sir William Long starting up and presenting himself before her in favourable contrast. Sir William had been unable to conceal his opinion of Edgar. Lily knew that he despised her

idol, but it was her quick woman's perception, sharpened to painful keenness by love, that divined it in his look and manner. She had never heard it from his own lips. He had never, to her, spoken a single word in disparagement of the young man.

Lily's first feeling when she perused the dam-natory letter addressed to Constant, was one of bitter grief. She felt that her life was blighted for ever. But when she began to reflect, and examine her heart, the feeling became one of shame. She had deceived herself; and in her blind selfishness had been ungrateful to one who loved her tenderly and truly—one who was worthy not merely of gratitude but of honour, and the most devoted love. When she went back to the retrospect of that Greenwich dinner, and remembered how she carried away with her the image of the tall handsome gentleman who was so good and kind, who took her on his knee and petted her fondly, who kissed her so lovingly and gently at parting—when she remembered that it was this image that she carried away with her to Paris, that it was this image that she clung to and loved, and that Edgar was merely a new presence of outward beauty which she had endued with all the generous qualities of the tall handsome form that was fading from her memory—when she made this discovery, she hid her face in her hands, and wept and sobbed for very shame. The god of her idolatry was Sir William Long;

and all this time she had worshipped a mere joss, which her fancy had invested with his attributes.

Sir William's natural delicacy would not allow him to seek an interview with Lily until after the first shock of her disenchantment had passed away. He called every day, however, to make kind inquiries after her, and always left a card, which Constant never failed to send up to Lily's room.

At first Lily was relieved to find that he did not ask to see her. She was afraid that he would despise her. She at least felt that she was not worthy of any other regard. She reproached herself bitterly, and often sat for hours in her own room, rocking herself to and fro, beating her throbbing brow with her little hands, and crying pitifully.

"How can I ever look in that good, generous face again? What will he think of me? What will he think of me?"

But as days passed on and Sir William still continued to call and leave a card without asking to see her, Lily began to feel uneasy. Did he despise her? and were these merely calls of formal courtesy? Her heart took alarm, and she found herself anxiously asking why he did not come. Every afternoon, about the time he was accustomed to call and leave his card, she found herself standing behind the curtains of her uncle's grand sitting-room, peeping out into the street to watch for his Brougham. Many Broughams and carriages drove

up to the door of Pomeroy's in the course of an afternoon, and Lily had no means of recognising Sir William's carriage unless she saw Sir William himself. One day a Brougham stopped, and Constant approached the door and stood talking for a few minutes with its unseen occupant. At the close of the colloquy, Lily observed a card given out to the hotel-keeper by a long thin white hand. It was his hand! Could she ever forget it! The hand which had fondled and patted her at Greenwich—the hand upon which she had noticed the great signet-ring engraved with the little bird, whose motto was “Hope and Fortune.”

Fortune had come, and she valued it not a straw. The grandeur by which she was surrounded chilled and terrified her; the jewels which her uncle had hung upon her were a weary chain binding her to a blank and soulless life. The hope at her breast, the hope of love and peace, had yet to be fulfilled.

“Oh, why does he not come? why does he not come?”

The very next day her longing desire was gratified. The Brougham drove up to the door, and from her love's watch-tower behind the silken curtain Lily saw Sir William get out and enter the hotel. Almost the next instant the servant announced him.

Lily's heart was fluttering in her breast like a scared bird in a cage. She felt ready to faint; the

room swam before her eyes, and she was about to fall, when her hands were gently seized and tenderly imprisoned between two others. She heard her name mentioned, and, lifting up her eyes from the ground, she saw looking down upon her the calm, earnest, loving face which had first won her child's heart, the bright vision of which had so long sustained and cheered her in the time of her misery and solitude.

"Tell me, Lily," said Sir William, almost doubtfully, "am I welcome? are you glad to see me?"

Lily could not reply. Her eyes fell, her head dropped upon her bosom, and she sank upon a couch.

Sir William sat down beside her, and begged for an answer.

"Lily, Lily," he said, "I love you; I have loved you with the same love ever since you were a little child at Greenwich. But you have forgotten it, perhaps?"

Poor Lily! It only pained her the more that he should think she had forgotten that bright day. She felt in her conscience that she had given him reason to think so.

"Forgotten it!" she said, "oh, no, no, no."

"Do you remember it well?" said the baronet.

"As if it were yesterday," Lily replied.

"Do you remember," he continued—"do you remember asking me if I were good? I was not

good then ; but I was a better man from that day. You asked me if I ever went to church ? I confessed to you that I never went to church. But I went to church on the following Sunday, and on many Sundays after that. Do you remember me peeling the apple, and throwing it over my left shoulder, when it fell upon the carpet in the shape of the letter W ? You clapped your hands and said, ‘How nice !’ and asked me to be your sweetheart ; but you were a child then. You don’t remember it as I do.”

Quite unconsciously, Sir William was cutting poor Lily to the very quick. She remembered all these things, and had thought of them often and often, clinging to them with a longing, loving heart, until the day that Edgar appeared. Then she began to forget. But *he* had never forgotten, and had cherished all these things to this day.

“Oh, Sir William,” she cried, “you make me feel that I have been very ungrateful, very foolish, very wicked.”

“Lily, Lily !” he exclaimed ; “what have I said to pain you ?”

“Nothing, nothing,” she said. “It is not you who have given me pain ; I have made the scourge for myself. I know the deep debt of gratitude I owe you——”

“Still that cold word, Lily,” he said, pitifully.

She hung her head and sobbed.

“Sir William,” she continued through her tears, “I owe you an apology; I ought to throw myself at your feet and beg your forgiveness on my knees; you, who have been so good, so kind, so trusting: while I—but I cannot speak what is at my heart. Leave me now; I am not worthy of you; let me write to you and explain all, and then, if you can forgive me——”

Her tears choked her utterance. She rose suddenly, gave him her hand, and rushed from the room, weeping and sobbing bitterly.

Sir William left the hotel with a sad heart, sorely troubled and perplexed. He could only guess at the cause of Lily’s distress. He discerned that she reproached herself for something—for having loved the worthless Edgar, perhaps. Or possibly she might have discovered that he, Sir William, was her mother’s unknown benefactor at Ranelagh, and was pained that she could not requite that kindness with love. And then he thought of his age. He was forty; his brow was becoming wrinkled, and his hair grey. He had spent the best of his days. And Lily? Lily was just budding into womanhood. As yet, before her the world lay all fresh and new, with joys and pleasures yet to be tasted. Why should he seek to link her young life with his. And yet the disparity was not so great after all. Marriages between forty and twenty were common enough, and, when made for love,

there was no reason why they should not be as happy as any other, nay happier, for the love of a man of forty is no fickle fancy, no boy's caprice. As for Sir William, he knew that he could love Lily with an abounding affection, that he could cherish her, and dote upon her to the last ; ay, that he could worship her as a holy being, and bow to her as to a guardian angel.

He waited anxiously for the letter. It came the next day, and it ran thus :

“ MY DEAR, GOOD, KIND FRIEND,—

“ I scarcely know what to say to you now that I have sat down to write the letter which I promised. I *feel* it all keenly and deeply—how unworthy I am, how ungrateful I must have appeared to you after all your kindness and all your goodness ; but I fear I shall not have words to tell you what my heart reveals to me, now that I have awakened from that delusive dream.

“ What I wish to say is, that I have never ceased to love you from that day at Greenwich, which I so well remember. Yes, it was *you* I loved. I know it now ; but how—how can I tell you ? I carried your image away with me to the school in Paris to which I was taken by my mother. I carried away with me not only a vision of your face, but the sound of your kind voice, the pressure of your gentle hand upon my hair, the soft touch of your

lips upon my brow. I was a solitary girl at school. I had no friends or relations who came to see me. I never went home for holidays like the other girls. Often for days and nights together I was *Quite Alone*—alone with your face, with your smile, with your touch, with your kiss. When I wished to bring your image before me, I closed my eyes and saw you, like a light in the dark. You were the embodiment to me of all that was handsome, and beautiful, and good.

“I hung my arms about the neck of the vision which I conjured up; I kissed the impalpable air, and felt the soft warmth of your lips. I was a child, a lonely child without father or mother, or any one to love. In you I loved father, mother, sister, brother, and everything that is good and lovable. I prayed that I might see you again; but weary months and weary years passed, and hope was becoming dead within me. I had seen nothing but misery, misery, misery; and it seemed as if I were doomed to be miserable to the end. My spirit sank. I began to forget myself—to forget *you*. I did not forget your goodness, for that was always about me, like an essence, filling my heart with boundless love. But the outward sign was fading. When I closed my eyes now the vision seemed faint and undefined. It was so long, long ago! I was forgetting your form and features. And yet my heart was clinging to its first love—to

you. But I was a heathen, and sought some visible sign in which to embody the attributes of my deity. Edgar Greyfaunt appeared, and he became my idol—the graven image which represented all I loved and adored. Out of the forlorn state of my vacant heart I conceived this illusion, and set up in that yearning empty place the vague thing I loved. I know now that it was not Edgar.

“But I blush to think how long I remained blind—how long I continued to give you pain, when you were so good, so noble, so patient. I feel to want to go down on my knees to you, to ask you to forget my folly, and to treat me as a poor, weak, silly child. Come what will, I will ever bless you, and think of you with love and gratitude.

“Yours ever,

“LILY.”

Sir William read this letter with a choking sensation in his throat, and the tears standing in his eyes; and when he had finished, smothered the paper with kisses.

“Poor dear Lily!” he exclaimed; “she is reproaching herself for being a little less than an angel. I will fly to her at once—But stay,” he added, checking himself, “what have I done that I should be blessed with such love as hers?” He paused for a moment in thought, then looked up reverently and exclaimed, “Heaven is merciful to me indeed!”

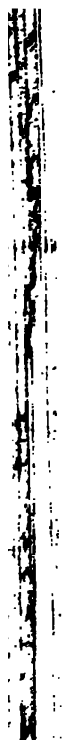
Sir William hastened to the hotel, and without waiting to be announced, strode up the stairs and entered the old Indian's reception-room. Lily was there alone. Before she could rise to receive him, the baronet ran to her, and seated himself on the couch beside her.

"Lily, dearest Lily," he said, "do you, will you love me? Will you take me by the hand, and give me a chance of heaven? Will you be my little wife; my good angel?"

Thinking of her, perhaps, as the child whom he had nursed and petted at Greenwich, he drew her towards him as he said this, and set her upon his knee, and Lily, yielding to his embrace, dropped her head upon his shoulder, and whispered assurance of undying love.

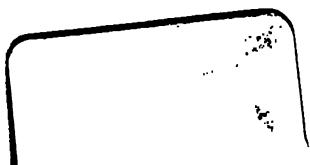
THE END.







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